THE BRIARY-BUSH

Joan Coghill

THE BRIARY-BUSH

A Novel

By

Floyd Dell

New York
Alfred · A · Knopf
1921

COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY
ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Published, October 31, 1921
Second Printing, November 1921

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

S. A. TANNENBAUM, M.D.,

EXPLORER OF THE DARK
CONTINENT OF THE MIND

"Oh, the briary-bush
That pricks my heart so sore!
If I ever get out of the briary-bush
I'll never get in any more!"

—Old Song

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE: COMMUNITY HOUSE

CHAPTER

I Felix Decides to Change His Character 3
II "Bon Voyage!" 9
III Plans 22
IV Surprises 28
V The Struggle for Existence 37
VI A Guide to Chicago 47
VII Work and Play 52
VIII Rose-Ann Goes Away 62

BOOK TWO: CANAL STREET

IX How to Spend One's Evenings 69
X The Detached Attitude 75
XI An Adventure in Philosophy 83
XII Bachelor's Hall 89
XIII In Hospital 99

BOOK THREE: WOODS POINT

XIV Heart and Hand 105
XV Pre-Nuptial 108
XVI Clive's Assistance 114
XVII Charivari 121
XVIII The Authority of the State of Illinois 131
XIX Together 134
XX "The Nest-Building Instinct" 143

BOOK FOUR: FIFTY-SEVENTH STREET

XXI Advancement 155
XXII Mainly About Clothes 162
XXIII A Bargain in Utopias 170
XXIV Studio 176
XXV St. George of the Minute 180
XXVI What Rose-Ann Wanted 187
XXVII Parties 197
XXVIII A Father-in-Law 201
XXIX Interlude at Midnight 207
XXX Fathers and Daughters 210

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

XXXI More or Less Theatrical 215
XXXII Duty 224
XXXIII A Parable 231
XXXIV Journeys 235
XXXV Civilization 244
XXXVI "We needs must know that in the days to come" 247
XXXVII Symbols 249
XXXVIII The Portrait of Felix Fay 254
XXXIX A Date on the Calendar 259
XL Celebration 264

BOOK FIVE: GARFIELD BOULEVARD

XLI Changes 271
XLII An Apparition 275
XLIII Nocturne 280
XLIV Aubade 292
XLV Foursome 297
XLVI The Rehearsal 307
XLVII The Fortunate Youth 312
XLVIII Dream-Tryst 317
XLVIX A Matter of Convention 322
L Babes in the Wood 330
LI "Bienfaits de la Lune" 334
LII Sleepless Nights 341
LIII Two Letters 348
LIV The God and the Pedestal 353

BOOK SIX: WILSON AVENUE

LV The Consolations of Philosophy 363
LVI Eulenspiegel 371
LVII Three Days 380
LVIII Rendezvous 385
LIX Unanswered Questions 394
LX A Leave-taking 397
LXI Two Men Discuss a Girl 401
LXII Theory and Practice 408
LXIII In Play 416
LXIV In Earnest 422

Book One

Community House

I. Felix Decides to Change His Character

1

CHICAGO!

Felix Fay saw with his mind's eye the map on the wall of the railway station—the map with a picture of iron roads from all over the middle west centering in a dark blotch in the corner.

He was sitting at a desk in the office of the Port Royal Daily Record, writing headings on sheaves of items sent in by country correspondents.

John Hoffman has finished his new barn.

Born to Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Hayes last Wednesday a fine ten pound boy.

Miss Edythe Brush has returned to the State Normal for the fall term.

And so on.

Felix wrote at the top of the page, *Wheaton Whittlings.* A rotten heading—but it would have to do. He yawned, and then stared unseeingly at the next page.

He was not thinking about those news-items. He was thinking about Chicago. . . .

A year ago, he had determined to leave Port Royal forever —and go to Chicago.

But here he was, still!

2

He had hoped, a year ago, to find, in the excitement of a new life in Chicago, healing for the desperate hurts of love. If only he had gone then! . . .

But he hadn't had the money to buy a railway ticket.

He had taken this job on the Record, and settled down to life in Port Royal again as a reporter.

His twenty-first year had gone by.

The hurts of love, so intolerably hard to bear, had healed.

After all, Joyce Tennant had loved him; nothing could

ever take away his memories of those starlit evenings on the river, and in the little cabin on their lonely island. She had loved him, she had been his. There was comfort in that thought. . . . The hurts of love had healed.

But the hurts of pride remained. Loving him, she had chosen to marry another. That wound still ached. . . .

She had seen him all along for what he was—a moonstruck dreamer! She had thought him the fit companion of a reckless love-adventure—that was all.

Her scorn, or what seemed to him her scorn, mirrored and magnified by the secret consciousness of his own weakness, came to assume in his mind the proportions of a final and universal judgment.

A dreamer? And a dreamer only? His egotism could not endure the thought.

The shadow-world of ideas, of theories, of poetic fancies, amidst which he had moved all his life, was not enough. He must live in the real world.

Chicago became for him the symbol of that real world. It was no longer a place of refuge—it was a test, a challenge. He would go there not as a moonstruck dreamer, but as a realist, able to face the hard facts of life.

He would become a different person.

He was tired of being Felix Fay the fool, the poet, the theorist. He would rather be anybody else in the world than that Felix Fay whose ridiculous blunderings he knew by heart.

He could imagine himself in Chicago, a changed person—a young man of action, practical, alert, ruthlessly competitive. . . .

Dreaming of success in Chicago, he sat idly at his desk in Port Royal.

3

It was late in the afternoon. No one was left in the office but himself and Hastings, the city editor.

"Fay!"

He looked up. The city editor beckoned him over.

"Look at this."

Hastings held in his hand the sheaf of items from Wheaton, over which Felix had casually written a heading half an hour before. Felix held out his hand and took them. Something was wrong. He looked anxiously at the items, written in grey pencil on coarse paper in a straggling hand. The page uppermost was numbered "3." He had hardly glanced at it. Evidently he had overlooked something.

It caught his eye instantly—the second item from the top:

A man named Cyrus Jenks, known as Old Cy, committed suicide last night by hanging himself in the barn. He was a well-known village character, chiefly noted for his intemperate habits. The inquest will be held today. His one good trait was his devotion to his old mother, who died recently. He was her illegitimate child. She was one of the Bensons, who until her disgrace were one of the principal families in the county. Her father was Judge Benson. The family moved to North Dakota years ago, and left her here in the old family home, where she lived alone with her son until she died. Before hanging himself Old Cy set fire to the house, and it was partly burned. Since the old lady's death he had received several offers for the place, but refused to sell, and said that no one should ever set foot in his mother's house. The incident is causing much local comment.

Felix drew a long breath. He certainly had overlooked something! He could see that story, with its headlines, on the front page of the Record—rewritten by himself. It was just the kind of story that he could handle in a way to bring out all its values. And he had had it in his hands—and had let it pass through them, buried in a collection of worthless country items!

"The postmistress at Wheaton," Hastings was saying gently, "is not supposed to know a front-page story. You are supposed to know—that is the theory on which you are hired."

Felix did not reply. There was nothing to be said.

Hastings was looking at him thoughtfully. "I don't know

what's got into you, Felix," he said. "I thought you were going to make a good newspaper man. And sometimes I think so still. But mostly—you aren't worth a damn."

"Yes, sir," said Felix. "—I mean, no, I don't think I am, either."

He was going to be fired. . . . Well, he deserved it. He ought to have been fired long ago. And he was rather glad that it was happening.

Hastings was rather taken aback. "Well," he said, "frankly, I was going to let you go. But—well, there's no harm done this time; we'd already gone to press when that stuff came in. Of course, I don't say that your—your letting it get by was excusable. In fact, I simply can't understand it. But—if you realize—"

So he was not going to be fired after all! Felix was unaccountably sorry.

"If you think you can pull yourself together—" said Hastings. "I'd hate to have you leave the Record. I've always—"

Felix felt desperate. He knew now why he wanted to be fired. It would give him the necessary push into his Chicago adventure. He would never have the courage to leave this job, and venture into the unknown, upon his own initiative. He didn't have any initiative.

"I don't think it's any use, Mr. Hastings," he said, "keeping me on the Record."

Hastings stared at him incredulously.

"I mean," Felix went on hastily, "I've got in a rut. I go through my work mechanically. I don't use my brains. I'm dull. And it's getting worse. I simply can't take any interest in my work."

"You mean you want to be fired?" Hastings asked severely.

It was absurd. In fact, it was preposterous. This was not the way to do it at all. But it was too late now.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Well, then, you are." Hastings looked coldly at the ungrateful and rather sheepish-looking youth standing

before him. "Have you got another job?" he asked suspiciously.

"No—I'm going to Chicago to look for one."

As soon as he said that, he wished he hadn't. It committed him to going. He couldn't back out now. He had to go.

"And I haven't any money except my pay-check for this week."

He hadn't thought of that before. How could he go without money?

"Will you lend me fifty dollars?"

It had slipped out without his intending it. Felix blushed. He was certainly behaving like a fool. After proving himself to Hastings an utter incompetent, to ask him for money. . . . He would go on a freight train. . . .

"Fifty—what are you talking about? Chicago!" Hastings was embarrassed, too. "Why —why—yes, I can lend you some money, if you really want it. . . . Chicago—I don't know but what you're right, after all. . . . When are you going?"

Felix was trying to think now before he spoke. He just managed to check himself on the point of saying, "Tonight!"

All this was happening too swiftly. He needed time to consider everything, to make his plans. A month would be none too much.

"Next m—Monday," he said.

4

When Felix left the office he went home by a roundabout way which took him up through one of the quiet residential streets of the town. He turned a corner, and walked slowly down past a row of cheerful little houses set back within well-kept lawns. There was nothing magnificent or showy about these houses—they did not betoken any vast prosperty or leisure, but only a moderate comfort and security. They might perhaps suggest a certain middle-class smugness; but even that was no reason why Felix should have looked at them from under his

slouching hat-brim with such a grimace of hostility. As he neared a particular one of these houses, he walked faster and bent his head, casting a furtive glance at its windows. But there was no one to be seen at those windows, and so Felix looked again and slowed his step a little. In front of the house he paused momentarily and looked at it with an apparently casual glance.

He had gone past that house, in this manner, a dozen times in the past year, savoring painfully each time the hard, unmistakable, disciplinary fact that there, contentedly under that roof, the wife of its owner, lived Joyce—his Joyce of only a year ago. He had come, now, to read that lesson in realism for the last time.

He did not want to see the girl who had taught him that lesson. He only wanted to look at this house in which she lived as another man's wife.

But, as he walked on past, he did see her. She was standing on the little side verandah. And in the vivid picture of her which Felix's eyes caught before he looked hastily away, he saw that she had a baby in her arms.

She was looking down at the baby, shaking her head teasingly above it so that stray locks of her yellow hair touched its face. It uttered a faint cry, and she shook her curly head again, and looked up, smiling.

But she did not see Felix. She was looking down the street past him. She was waiting for someone—for the owner of this house, her husband; waiting for the man who was the father of her child.

This Felix saw and felt with a bewildered and hurt mind in the moment before he turned his eyes away to stare at the sidewalk in front of him. He walked on, and in another moment he must perforce enter the field of her vision as he passed along the street in which her eyes were searching for another man. He braced himself, threw his head back, and commenced to whistle a careless tune.

If she saw him, if she noted the familiar slouch of his hat as he passed out of her sight, she would never know that he had seen—or cared.

II. "Bon Voyage!"

I

THE family were apparently not at all surprised when, at the supper-table, Felix announced his sudden decision.

"Well, I knew you'd be going one of these days," his brother Ed remarked.

That seemed strange to Felix, who had kept his Chicago intentions carefully to himself all that year. . . .

And his brother Jim, who was working again in spite of his lameness, was quite converted from his supper-table querulousness by the announcement. "When I was in Chicago—" he said, and told stories of the Chicago of ten years ago, where he had tried briefly to gain a foothold. It remained in his mind, it seemed, not as a failure, but as a glorious excursion. . . .

Alice, Ed's wife, was enchanted. Her cheeks glowed, and she asked endless questions. It appeared that none of them had the slightest doubt of Felix's ultimate, and splendid, success. It really seemed as if they envied him!

And all the while, Felix was thinking what an ironic spectacle he would present if he returned home in a month or two. He clenched his fists under the table-edge, and swore to himself that he would never—never—make that confession of failure. . . .

"You must write to your mother and tell her all about it, Felix," said Alice.

His mother and father were down on the farm in Illinois where Mrs. Fay had lived as a little girl. She had never adjusted herself to town life; nor had her husband. They were best content in the country, where she could grow flowers in the front yard and he could fatten and butcher and salt down a couple of hogs for the winter. . . . Their

only grievance was that their children found so little time to come and visit them. Ed usually came once a year, in the slack season, and Jim when he needed a rest; but Felix, it seemed, was always too busy. . . .

"Why bother her about my going to Chicago?" Felix grumbled.

"Why, Felix!" Alice reproached him. She could never understand why it was so hard for him to write to his mother.

"I don't want her worrying about me," Felix explained uncomfortably.

"She won't worry about you," Alice insisted. "She'll be proud of you!"

Felix wondered if people always had to lie to themselves about their prospects before they could do anything. . . . Perhaps he ought to lie to himself; but he preferred to face the facts as they were. He would have to embellish them a little, however, in writing to his mother. . . .

When supper was cleared away, and Jim had gone out to sit on the front steps, and Ed and Alice were in the front room playing one of the newest records on the phonograph, Felix wrote briefly and shyly to his mother—explaining that he was fairly certain to get something to do in Chicago very quickly. . . . And then, by way of savouring in advance the grim realities of his adventure, he wrote a long letter to Helen Raymond in New York—a letter in which he made clear the wild recklessness of his plans. He felt that the woman who had befriended him when she was the librarian at Port Royal and he a queer boy who worked in a factory and wrote poetry, would understand this newest folly of his.

But what a waste of time, writing letters, when he had only six days left in which to prepare for going to Chicago! . . . He determined to use those remaining days very carefully and sensibly.

He bought a street map the next morning, and went home to study it. But it was hard to give it due attention at home. His sister-in-law was mending and pressing his

clothes, and collecting and inspecting his shirts, and talking excitedly about his trip. "If you run short of money, Felix, you just write to us for it. Ed and I will see that you get it somehow." Felix was fiercely resolved not to be a burden to them after he went to Chicago, and these offers made him uncomfortable. Why should Alice be so interested in this expedition of his anyway? She was as concerned about it as though it were she herself who was going. She wanted to know his plans; and when he did not seem to have any, she persisted in trying to make them for him.

He was not going to get any opportunity to study that street map at home. He decided that he would go and spend a few days at his friend Tom Alden's little place in the country, where he would find a more congenial atmosphere.

2

Too congenial! Tom was the same perfect companion of an idle hour—instinctively expert in gilding that idleness with delightful talk until it ceased to seem mere idleness—the same old Tom that Felix had loafed away long evenings with last summer, when they were supposed to be writing novels. Tom was still desultorily working upon his novel; but he put it aside to walk in the woods and talk with Felix about Chicago. It was not, however, of the grim Chicago which loomed in Felix's mind, that Tom talked.

Tom, as Felix now realized, was a romantic soul. Chicago had been to him a series of brilliant vacation-trips, a place of happy occasional sanctuary from the dull realities of middle-class life in Port Royal: an opportunity for brief, stimulating human contacts, not at all a place to earn a living in.

Lying in the cool grass beside the creek where he and Felix had spent so many illusioned hours a summer ago, he talked with dreamy enthusiasm of genial drunken poets and philosophers and friends met at the Pen Club—and of their girl companions, charming and sophisticated, whose loves were frank and light-hearted.

Felix walked up and down impatiently. A year ago he too had dreamed of Tom's Chicago—

"Midnights of revel
And noondays of song!"

But he knew better now. He could imagine the Pen Club, with its boon-companionship of whiskey and mutual praise. These, he told himself, were the consolations of failure. He might, he reflected grimly, have to fall back on these things at forty. But in the meantime he would try to learn to face reality.

And those light Chicago loves—he suspected that the romantic temperament had thrown a glamour over these also. He was not going to Chicago for Pen Club friendship nor the solace of complaisant femininity. . . . While Tom Alden reminisced of glorious nights of talk and drink and kisses, Felix was brooding over a scene inside his mind which he called Chicago—a scene in which the insane clamour of the wheat-pit was mingled with stockyards brutality and filth. This was what he must deal with. . . .

"What's on your mind?" Tom asked.

"Nothing. Except—I came here to study my street map, and I haven't looked inside it."

"Never mind your street map just now," Tom said. "We're going to the station to meet Gloria and Madge."

Madge was a cousin of Tom's, and Gloria her especial—and beautiful—friend. They were just back from a trip abroad, and Tom had asked them out to dinner to hear what they had to tell.

"You mustn't be prejudiced against Gloria because of her eyelashes," Tom urged. "She has rather a mind, I think."

So Felix, reluctantly, went along to the station.

Tom jested at his reluctance. "Why, are you afraid of becoming entangled in Gloria's celebrated eyelashes?"

"No, I'm not afraid of that," Felix said.

Tom laughed and put his hand on Felix's shoulder.

"Think, they bring us news of the great world: London! Paris! Doesn't that stir you?"

"No," Felix retorted, "for I don't believe it. They bring back what they took with them."

"Wait and see! I hear rumours that Gloria has become fearfully cosmopolitan."

When Gloria and Madge stepped from the train, it was evident, even to so careless an observer as Felix, that they had been at least outwardly transformed. Every woman in Port Royal was wearing the wide-flaring "Merry Widow" hat; and these girls wore small close-fitting hats—Gloria's being a jaunty little flower-confection, and Madge's a tiny straw turban set off by a perky feather.

"Dear old Tom," said Gloria, embracing him affectionately. "Too busy to come to town to see old friends, so old friends have to come see him. Busy writing great novel?"

"More or less," Tom answered, and they started back up the road. "How's Europe?"

"We tore ourselves from the arms of doting relatives to come and tell you—When one's been all over the world, what's a few miles more? . . . even when it means getting one's new Paris shoes all dusty! Have you noticed them, Tom?" She paused on one toe and looked down sidewise admiringly at her foot.

"I noticed a generally exotic effect," Tom admitted.

"Tan suede!" Gloria explained. "And then, our blouses. Something quite new. And—but mustn't talk to great philosopher about such frivolous things. Must talk about art and socialism. There are lots of socialists over there, in France and Germany—and even in England!"

"So you found that out," Tom observed. "Now I suppose you regard socialism as quite respectable."

"Oh, most respectable. But just as hard to understand as ever! Though I was able, when I talked to some of them at the Countess of Berwick's tea, to appear quite intelligent on the subject, on account of having listened to you. I used 'proletarian' and 'proletariat' without once getting them mixed."

"The Countess of Berwick! Our little Gloria flew high, didn't she?"

"Oh, all sorts of people go to the Countess of Berwick's teas. You've only to be reputed 'interesting,' and you get invited everywhere. And how do you suppose I got into the 'interesting' class? Not by my gifts of intellect, Tommy. But—you know, they expect Americans to behave queerly. They're disappointed if we don't. There was an American poet over there, a tame professor poet, and they were disappointed because he didn't come to dinner in boots and spurs and a red shirt or something. So I bethought myself —and got invited. You know my baby-talk? I brought it out and polished it up for the occasion. You should have heard me! Baby-talking to England's brightest and best. And they fell for it. They consider it oh, so American! I nearly set a fashion in London, Tommy. Me, having been brought up in Miss Pettit's most exclusive school, and taught to act like a lady, and then making a hit in London with bad manners. The baby-talk wasn't all. Daughter of American Plough Magnate Puts Feet on Table and Tells Naughty Stories—that sort of thing. They like it."

"You mustn't believe her, Tom," Madge interrupted. "She didn't do any such thing."

"Tom understands me," Gloria laughed. "Exaggeration for effect. Just like in a novel. If you put my London visit in a novel, Tom, you'd have me putting my feet on the table, wouldn't you?"

"But my imagination," said Tom, "would balk at the picture of you telling naughty stories."

"Oh, but Tom, I've been to Paris since you used to know me, and I've become very, very wicked. Don't contradict me, Madge. I've got to persuade Tom that I got some benefit out of my year abroad. Yes, Tom, you've no idea how broad-minded Paris has made me. Why, if somebody should mention a man's 'mistress' to me now, I wouldn't shudder and turn pale. I would probably say, 'Dear me, has he only one?' That's what Paris has made of me. I'm brazen, Tom—brazen."

They reached the house, and there they chattered on till dinner, and through dinner, and after dinner in Tom's living

room—Felix playing a silent part, and inwardly contemptuous of Gloria's assumed sophistication. Gloria made a few attempts to draw him into the conversation, but these being resisted, she devoted herself to Tom. Growing confidential, she told him the newest fashions in French lingerie—Madge protesting only slightly, for after all, wasn't Tom her cousin? and Felix didn't count. "They're still wearing muslin over here," said Gloria, "while we, Tom dear, come from Paris intimately attired in georgette and chiffon—if you know what that means. All the difference in the world, I can assure you! One's Puritanism goes when one puts on chiffon next to one's skin. And think, Tom, I never dreamed, all my poor wasted life in Iowa, that nightgowns could be anything but white muslin. Well, you should see the lovely nighties that Madge and I brought home. You'd never guess the colour. . . . Lavender! Why, the social circles of Port Royal are rocking with it! A blow, Tom, at the very foundations of middle-class morality. Lavender nighties!"

"I do think," Tom said, "that what people wear makes a difference in their attitude toward life."

"Oh, I can feel the difference already. My Presbyterian conscience shrivelled up and perished at the touch of that pagan garment. My whole attitude toward life has changed."

Felix shrugged his shoulders by way of expressing his unbelief in the paganism of lavender nightgowns.

"What are they writing in Paris now?" Tom asked.

"Well, Tom, I admit I was surprised at first. I never dreamed that even the French could be so—French. But I got used to it. I like it now. Even Madge likes it. She makes me translate the wickedest passages for her."

"I don't any such thing," Madge objected.

"What is there so wicked in those passages?" asked Felix, speaking for almost the first time.

Gloria considered him for a moment before replying. "Nothing really wicked at all," she said. "Wicked only according to our stupid Anglo-Saxon notions. Simply frank, that's all."

"I wonder," said Felix, "if they are really more frank than English novels—the best of them. Defoe and Fielding were rather frank, you know."

Gloria shrugged her pretty shoulders. "If there was anything like that in Defoe and Fielding, it escaped my innocent young mind when I read them." She turned again to Tom. "They omit nothing—Nothing!"

"You excite my curiosity," Tom said sceptically. "Please describe more specifically the Nothing which they omit."

Gloria laughed, and sketched lightly and brightly the plot of one of the most outrageous new French novels—extreme, she admitted, even for France. "Every other chapter," she said, "is one which the boldest English novelist would leave to your imagination. In this story, here it is, with, I assure you, a wealth of detail."

"A wealth of words, rather, I suspect," said Tom. "The same words that have done duty in the same French novels for a generation: *volupté—exquise—baiser—baiser*. . . . The same old thing, so far as I gather from your description, Gloria. That kind of eloquent rhetoric isn't frankness,—at least not the kind of literary frankness that Felix and I are interested in."

"Forgive me, Tom!" said Gloria, with mock humility. "My mistake! Here I have been going across the ocean in search of sensation, and all the while the real shock was waiting for me right here at home. In your novel you have doubtless outdone the puny efforts of these mere foreigners. What do they know about frankness? I abase myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"

"I really do think," said Tom, "that you imagine the truth can be told only in French."

"I suppose I was guilty of that foolish error. But I pine for enlightenment. Give me the truth—the Truth!—in my own native tongue!"

Tom shook his head. "I didn't say I had tried to tell it."

"Oh, don't disappoint me that way, Tom. Surely you are not going to let these Frenchmen put it over on you! Don't say that!"

"Well," Tom said gravely, "Felix has a chapter in his novel here—I found the manuscript in my desk and was just reading it again the other day—that I think goes a little beyond anything I have ever seen in any French novel."

Gloria turned to Felix and stared. "Well!" she cried. "America is saved! Will you read it to us, Mr Fay?"

"No," he said.

"Oh, why not!"

"Don't want to."

"I think you show a lack of confidence in us, Mr Fay. Here we put ourselves in your hand. We open our hearts to you. We conceal nothing. And you sit there with a masterpiece of literary frankness up your sleeve, and refuse to read it. I don't think it's fair."

Felix was silent. He really wanted to read that chapter. He was proud of it. But he must not become interested in novel-writing again. It would distract his mind too much from the Chicago adventure. That unfinished novel ought to remain in that drawer in Tom's desk until he had made good in Chicago.

"I don't believe it's so frank, after all," said Gloria, returning to the attack. "That's why you're afraid to read it. You're afraid of disappointing our expectations."

Felix looked at her defiantly.

"All right, I will," he said.

"Oh, this is worth coming back for."

He rose and went to Tom's room. He returned, a little doubtfully, with the manuscript. "I want to say first of all that there is nothing intentionally shocking about this chapter. It simply aims to tell how people really behave under circumstances usually glossed over with romantic phrases."

At any rate, Gloria would understand; so why should he hesitate?

He began to read. From the first page, he was aware of a transformation in the atmosphere of the occasion. Gloria, who had been leaning forward with dramatic eagerness, became rigid in her attitude, and her humorous smile seemed to

have become tensely frozen in its place. Madge had picked up a magazine, opened it to a picture, and continued to look at the picture while listening alertly, with an air of being at a key-hole. Tom continued gravely smoking his pipe, apparently oblivious of any constraint upon the others. After a little, Gloria carefully relaxed her attitude, and leaned back, looking above Felix's head, with an impassive face and arms straight at her sides. Felix defiantly read on.

He knew there was nothing really shocking about the chapter—at least, to an enlightened and adult mind such as Gloria's. It did not occur to him that in its local colour and middle-western psychology, there was something—not present in the most highly flavoured French romance—to disturb the pretences and awake the painful and ashamed memories of a middle-western mind: something sufficiently near to the unromantic truth of Gloria's own secret life, perhaps, to evoke in her an hysterical disgust. . . . He only knew that the situation was becoming uncomfortable, and that he was sorry he had ever got into it.

He finished the chapter. There ensued a painful silence.

"Very remarkable writing indeed, Mr. Fay," was all the comment the young woman back from abroad had to offer. Evidently what was delightfully daring in Paris was something else in Port Royal on the Mississippi. . . .

Felix, not knowing quite what to think, went to put his manuscript away. Surely Gloria could not have been really shocked! . . . When he returned, they were all talking with animation about something else. . . . Presently it was time for the girls to leave. "I hear you're going to Chicago soon," Gloria said sweetly to Felix. *"Bon voyage!"*

"I have made a fool of myself again," Felix said to himself bitterly.

3

The next day, and the next, Felix and Tom talked again about Chicago; but not in the realistic vein Felix would have preferred. Tonight he must go back to town; he had already stayed too long—he was falling into his old habit

of day-dreaming about the future. . . . That chapter had set him off. Gloria had been—well, startled and impressed, to say the least. That chapter *was* good. Perhaps he was destined to help bring back to English fiction its lost candour, the candour of the Elizabethans and Defoe and Fielding.

But no, he must not think about such things now. He would have no time for writing, for a long while, in Chicago. He would be too much immersed in the struggle for existence. If he were to write novels, he ought to stay in Port Royal. Yes, he might take the civil service examination and get a quiet job in the post-office that would give him time to think and dream and write. . . .

He sprang up. He knew quite well what this meant. Cowardice! If he got into the post-office, he would stay there forever. . . . He started abruptly toward the house, leaving Tom in the midst of an anecdote of old Chicago days.

He had left the map on Tom's desk. His novel was in that same desk. If he started reading that novel again, he might decide to stay in Port Royal and finish it. He wondered whether the map or the novel would claim him when he sat down at that desk. Five minutes at that desk might decide his whole future for him. . . .

He went into Tom's room, went over to the desk—and from a letter lying open beside the pen-tray there flashed up to him his own name, *Felix Fay* . . . with a fringe of words about it.

Those words startled him, and he bent over the letter to make sure that they were really there; he read them, and turned to see the signature—it was that of Madge Alden; and then he sat down in Tom's chair and read slowly that paragraph of three sentences.

"Is that nasty young man Felix Fay really a friend of yours? I think he'd better leave Port Royal quick. The story of that horrible chapter is all over town and—well, if you knew the things Gloria is saying about him!"

So Gloria had betrayed him to Port Royal.

4

He sank back in his chair, amazed at his sensations. He had never thought any written words could affect him like that. He had never cared what people thought. . . .

It was absurd. He felt as though a cannon-ball had gone through his abdomen. He sat there, weak, stunned, gasping for breath—with a mind curiously detached, floating somewhere above that stunned body, wondering. . . . It was curious that anything in the world could hurt so much.

Then, in a rush, all his energy seemed to come back, flooding and filling his body—as if to provide him the strength with which to return blow for blow. And that superfluity of strength was worse than the weakness had been—for there was no one, nothing to fight. Words out of the air had hurt him, and he could not fight back.

The emotion which flooded him ebbed at last, leaving him in a curious mood of utter coldness. The thought came into his mind: "Nothing that ever happens to me can hurt me after this—nothing."

He opened the drawer. He wanted to see that unfinished novel. He wanted to know what it was really like. He felt capable of judging it calmly.

He turned the pages here and there, reading at random, now with affection and now with contempt, making up his mind. . . . He suddenly realized that he was feeling ashamed of it all. He did not realize that this new humiliation, at the hands of a girl, had awakened painful memories of the love-affair which he had celebrated in this novel, and which had ended so differently in real life from the way it was to end in this book; he only knew that he was ashamed.

The style, he said to himself, was bad—very bad.

He forced himself to read again the chapter which had caused all the trouble. It made him smile painfully. Why, this bald and painstaking frankness of his was not courageous, it was merely comic! . . . He turned the pages again. This stuff was not a novel.

He had been an idler, a dreamer, a fool. . . .

And suddenly he remembered something—a scene from

a long time ago: it was in school, and the principal was looking over a boy's shoulder at a piece of paper upon which, day-dreaming of his future, the boy had written: *"Felix Fay, the great novelist. . . ."*

He heard the principal telling that boy to write those words on the blackboard, to show the class what he had been doing instead of attending to his lessons. He saw the boy, pale and trembling, rise and face a hundred curious, staring eyes. . . .

Felix had not recalled that scene for years; it had hurt too much. But now it was no longer painful. He saw the scene for the first time impersonally; and he felt that the principal had been right. . . .

Gazing down at the manuscript in his hand, he pronounced sentence upon it in the words in which the principal had once condemned that boy. "This is what is known as egotism," he whispered.

He rose, stuffed the pages into Tom's fireplace and set fire to them with a match. Then, while the record of all his futile dreaming went up in smoky flame, he turned back to the desk, sat down, and bent over the microscopic squares and confused lettering of the street-map of Chicago.

III. Plans

1

COMING home, Felix found a letter from Helen Raymond, congratulating him on his decision to go to Chicago, and enclosing two letters of introduction, one of them to an editorial writer on an afternoon paper, the other to some one at a settlement house.

Helen was, he perceived, like Tom, a romanticist. She would be quite capable of believing that these little pieces of paper assured him a welcome in Chicago! . . . She had, with a kind of pathetic maternal fussiness, taken his destinies in charge; and Felix rather wished she hadn't. She had even directed him as to which train he should take on Monday—apparently confident that some one, in response to her suggestion, would be at the station to meet him. As if people in Chicago had time for such amenities!

It was in the mood of one who goes alone against the enemy, that Felix took the train to Chicago. And armed with a paper sword! For so it was that he thought of his letters of introduction. Of what use were letters of introduction in Chicago? Well he knew how unconscious Chicago would remain of the arrival of one more poor struggler. His coming might mean everything to him, but it meant nothing at all to Chicago. That was the obvious truth, and why not face it?

2

On the train he took out his money and counted it again, though he knew quite definitely how much he had. But it was reassuring to feel the crisp bills in his hand. Well, he would not starve for three or four weeks anyway. He considered the advisability of putting away separately enough

to pay his fare back home, but decided against it. "I am not going back home," he said to himself.

He went over his plans once more. From the station he would go to a certain cheap hotel that Tom had suggested. Tom had stayed there once when he was nearly broke. Then he would look about for a cheap room. That secured, he would spend a day wandering about the city and familiarizing himself with its streets. The third day he would go to look for a job. And the fourth day—and all the other days—he would continue to look for a job: until he got one.

There was no use in going over his plans any more. He took a book from his suitcase to read.

He had taken along only one book. . . . He had smiled ironically when choosing it, remembering the old literary discussions as to what book one would choose to have along when cast away on a desert island. Here was a more practical problem: what book one should choose for solace when cast alone into the midst of a complex and difficult civilization. On a desert island one would want something to remind one of people, of civilization—perhaps Henry James; or more likely the Arabian Nights. But for his Chicago campaign he had chosen H. G. Wells' "First and Last Things."

He opened the book and began to read. . . . He discovered after a while that he had been reading the same sentence over and over:

"It seems to me one of the heedless errors of those who deal in philosophy, to suppose all things that have simple names or unified effects are in their nature simple and may be discovered and isolated as a sort of essence by analysis."

Under ordinary circumstances that sentence was doubtless perfectly clear; but on the train to Chicago it was strangely hard to understand. And when he recalled his wandering thoughts, put aside his emotions of expectation and fear, and looked at the sentence again, its meaning was singularly comfortless. That simple things are not so simple after all—yes, that was just the trouble!

Going to Chicago, for instance. Thousands of young men did it every year; his journey was merely one of the items of those broad sociological generalizations which the university extension lecturers were fond of uttering. From the outside it was simple enough. It had apparently been taken for granted by his family and friends for the last two or three years that Felix would go to Chicago. Certain people, it seemed, inevitably went. Being one of those people, he had gone.

But *why?*

He restlessly put aside the book and stared out the window. Why? He hadn't the least idea, and he rather wished he were back in Port Royal, with time and leisure to work out the answer to that question satisfactorily. . . .

"Going to Chicago?"

It was a genial elderly man in the seat opposite asking the question—a plump man with a little pointed beard sprinkled with grey, and laughing wrinkles about his eyes. He leaned forward in a friendly manner.

"Yes," Felix answered.

"First time?" the man asked shrewdly.

"Yes,"—and Felix wondered why it should be the first time. Why, living only five hours away from Chicago, had he never gone there to reconnoitre, to learn to find his way about, to get the lay of things? It had been stupid of him not to.

"I came to Chicago for the first time forty years ago," the elderly man was saying. "And I was just about as scared as you are." He laughed kindly, and tapped Felix's knee. "But I needn't have been. Chicago's a fine town. No place better for a young man to go. You don't need to worry, my boy. Chicago's on the lookout for bright young people."

Yes—but that was just what was bothering Felix Fay. He was afraid he was not a bright young person in the ordinary meaning of the term.

The man entered upon a lively account of his early struggles and successes in the hides and leather business.

"What's your line?" he suddenly asked, smiling.

"I—write," Felix said, embarrassed. "I want to get a job on a newspaper." How remote that seemed from the hides and leather business!

"Well, we've got some fine newspapers in Chicago. I read the Tribune myself. I always turn first thing to the funny column. I miss it when I'm out of town—doesn't seem like breakfast is complete without it." He paused, with a reminiscent air. "But none of them are as good as 'Gene Field used to be! My, how I did enjoy the things he wrote. I know a man who used to know him right well, too; tells stories about him. 'Gene was a great old boy." He sighed,

Felix was startled. He had not suspected that in the hides and leather business there was room for this quaint literary sentimentalism. . . .

"What's your name?" Felix told him. "Mine's Anderson—John Anderson. I'm getting off here at Elgin. You might come and see me at my office in Chicago some time, and tell me how you're getting along. I'll give you my card. . . . Well, Mr. Fay, you drop in any time—or ring me up—and we'll go out to lunch. I'll take you to a nice chop-house. Maybe," he grinned, "you'll need a good meal, now and then, before you get started. You just ring me up!" He shook hands warmly, took down his big suitcase, and left the train.

3

Felix frowned. It was pleasant, of course, to be so genially treated by a stranger. But he must not get any false ideas of Chicago from this incident. He would think twice about accepting Mr. John Anderson's invitation to come and see him; and he would certainly not come if he were in need of a meal; probably Mr. Anderson would have forgotten all about him by the next day, anyway. He put away Mr. Anderson's card in the pocket in which his letters of introduction were stored. Again he frowned, took out his letters of introduction, looked at them, and put them back.

He could forget Mr. Anderson's card, but what could he do with those letters of introduction?

They were in a way a serious embarrassment. Helen would expect him to make use of them. . . . He could see himself presenting his letter to Mr. Blake at the Community House, and being regarded with puzzled surprise. "What does he want of us?" Mr. Blake would be asking himself. . . .

Well, what did he want of them? Nothing.

He had a great notion to tear those letters up and throw them away before he had made a fool of himself with them. . . .

4

Chicago! Endless blocks of dwellings, a glimpse of great buildings, and then the dusky gloom of a huge station. He seized his suitcase, descended from the train, and heard his name called questioningly.

He turned to meet a smiling, straw-haired youth, who shook his hand, and relieved him of his suitcase. "I'm right? Helen gave me a good description, and I was sure it was you! My name is Blake—Will Blake. Well, how's Port Royal? And my friend Hastings of the Record? And Judge Beecher and Rabbi Nathan, Dr. Truesdale and the rest of 'em? I know Port Royal quite well, I've lectured there so much. And Helen tells me you're the reporter that gave our series such good stories."

Felix bewilderedly recognized this affable youth as the university instructor whose lectures in the extension series on sociological problems he had attended and reported; and he realized that between Port Royal and Chicago, so remote in his imagination, there were at least some few human links. Even so, this struck him as being in the nature of a remarkable coincidence.

Meanwhile, Felix had been escorted to a street-car. It was dusk, and the streets were crowded. But Blake's friendly questioning served to distract his attention from the bewildering hugeness of the city. With but the slightest

opportunity for feeling his individual insignificance against this new background of rushing, roaring life, he was talked half way across Chicago to a place where, at an intersection of busy and dirty little streets, rose a gracious and homelike building. "This is Community House," said Blake. "I'll take you right up to your room, and you can meet the Head and the residents at dinner."

Left alone in the room—where, as his escort had casually assured him, he was to stay until he had made other plans—Felix strove to regain his sense of the verities.

He knew already of the existence, and the purposes, of Community House. It was one of those institutions which he had discussed, knowingly and scornfully, in the Socialist local back in Port Royal—it was one of the "bourgeois-idealistic" attempts to obscure, by means of a futile benevolence, the class-struggle between the rich and the poor. . . .

His actual feeling, however, was one of gratitude toward the cheerful shelter of this little room. He went to the window. It was strangely exhilarating to look out over the smoke and grime of this tumble of roofs, from the window of a room so instantly and pleasantly his own.

He had a curious feeling of ease and security—a feeling which he strove to repress. . . .

Secure, and at ease—that seemed indeed a foolish way for one to feel who was about to commence the grim battle of life in Chicago!

IV. Surprises

I

DURING those first days Felix was trying hard—too hard!—to adjust himself to the world of reality: which after all has its kindly aspects.

The second day, Felix set out to explore Chicago. He had conned on the map and fixed in his mind the location of various streets; but as the points of the compass seemed, when once he had left Community House, to have got strangely twisted, these preliminary lessons were confusing rather than otherwise. After a brief survey of the loop district, he found himself looking from the steps of the public library, at Michigan Avenue, and beyond that the lake.

Summer had just turned into autumn; it was a cool day, and there was a light wind glancing over the surface of the water. Felix drew a long breath, and looked down the Avenue. Only a few people were on the sidewalk at that hour, but those few, with their air of infinite leisure, gave it the quality of a boulevard. Along the smooth roadway, still wet from a rain which had fallen during the night, a few motor cars skimmed by; and the people in them seemed to have that same air of careless light-hearted enjoyment of life. To the south, great clouds of white steam arose from beside a black shed which Felix guessed to be an Illinois Central station, and floated airily across to blur the outlines of the buildings that faced the Avenue. Felix stood still, wondering at himself. There was something odd about this: Chicago seemed beautiful! But doubtless that notion merely proved him to be what he was, a boy from the country.

Half ashamed of the thrill which he got out of this

sight, he crossed to the building on the lake front which must be the Art Institute. But he found its pictures dull in comparison with the one he had left outside. He went back to the street, and sniffed eagerly at the wind from off the lake. He was experiencing a curious emotional release in the presence of its vastness. Not only himself, but Chicago, suddenly seemed small at its side. A city perched on the edge of a huge inland sea!

And then, convinced that his mood was an unrealistic one, he took the south side elevated to the stockyards. . . . In its gruesome realities he would find an antidote to this romanticism.

He was one of a long queue of visitors who were led from one building to another and lectured at and shown the sights. After an hour he had seen nothing sufficiently gruesome to be exciting, and he was becoming annoyed with his fellow-visitors. They stared at the workers with a kind of dull unimaginative pity. Felix resented those stares. He felt that he understood these workers; had he not been one of them himself in factory days at Port Royal! There was something indecent in this gaping and pointing. He dropped out of line and went away.

He had missed the great scene, still to come—the cattle-killing. But he reflected that he was a butcher's son. This was merely a slaughter-house on a grand scale. He had nothing new to learn from the stockyards. . . .

2

But he was inevitably depressed by his day of confused sight-seeing; the hugeness of the city had in the end made him feel useless and helpless. It was a relief to meet again at dinner the pleasant men and women residents of Community House who had been so gracious to him the evening before.

His shyness had lifted sufficiently the previous evening to let him engage in a lively argument. There had been something very gratifying to him in the way they listened to what he said—without agreement, to be sure, but on terms

of interested equality. It had made him feel at home; and it was only afterward, in his room, that he had realized the duty of guarding himself against these easy reassurances. He told himself that these people were all engaged in trying to obscure the grim realities of life. But he must not let himself be deceived. Their friendliness was well-meant; but it had to be discounted. . . . It was all too well calculated to soothe a bruised egotism, to relax a mood of stern self-abasement—to make an impressionable young man forget that he was a mere unconsidered atom in a cruel chaos. This easy hospitality could not be the truth about Chicago. It was a mask, behind which the real Chicago hid its terrible, grim face. . . .

The argument last night had been about literature and the way it was taught in the schools. Concerning school methods of dealing with poetry Felix had been particularly scornful. Tonight Blake took up the argument again, and Felix explained himself vigorously. Only those who could *do* a thing, he insisted, were capable of really understanding it; and it did not matter that they did it badly—so long as they thereby came to understand it creatively.

A red-haired young woman at the further end of the long table was the only one who appeared to take his arguments with any seriousness; at least he thought he saw approval in her eyes. The others, or so it seemed to him, were only politely amused at the intensity of his feelings on the subject. But when he had concluded his argument, the motherly-looking woman at the head of the table said, "Perhaps if Mr. Fay feels like that, he will be willing to undertake a class in English literature twice a week for us. Mr. Hays, who has had the class, is leaving town. You'll have a chance, Mr. Fay, to try out your theories on twenty very interested young people—who I'm sure would be glad to learn to produce literature as well as to appreciate it. I think, myself, there's something to your theory—though I don't hold much by theories any more. I think a great deal depends on the enthusiasm with which they are carried out. I'm sure you will make an enthusiastic teacher—I only hope you won't

become too quickly discouraged. Do you think you'd like to try it?"

Gracious and even flattering as this offer was, yet the challenge in it rather staggered Felix. He had not expected to be called upon to prove the correctness of his theory in actual practice; he had never supposed that he would ever have the opportunity. Teaching was a province sacred to those who themselves had been elaborately taught—certainly not to be intruded upon by a youth who had never finished high school! Yet, if he believed in his own theory, he ought to be willing to put it to the test. He ought to take up this challenge. But did he dare risk a humiliating failure? And then his eyes met those of the red-haired girl down at the other end of the table; and he knew that she expected him to do it.

"Thank you for the chance," he said. "I'll be glad to."

The talk swept on to other things, leaving him a little dazed. He had been quite casually accepted as one whose abilities might be of value; he had astonishingly become a part of this institution; and upon no false pretences—for in his argument he had candidly exposed the deficiencies of his formal schooling. These people were willing to try him out. And they went on talking as though nothing strange had occurred. . . . The loneliness and helplessness in which he had been submerged by his day of sight-seeing, ebbed away.

"Won't you tell me something more about your idea? It's very interesting to me, because I'm in charge of a group of children who are doing plays."

The red-haired girl was speaking to him as they drifted out of the dining-room. She was a slender young person, of about twenty-five years, with an interestedly impersonal manner. She turned to a young man at her other side, an affected-looking young man, with a wide black ribbon depending from his nose-glasses, and said: "Paul, is your model set ready? Let us have a private view of it."

"Charmed," the young man replied, in a mincing accent. Felix disliked him at once.

"Paul," the red-haired girl explained, turning back to

Felix, "is our scenic genius. He makes the most wonderful little sets out of painted cardboard, and then we go and spoil them trying to carry them out in our theatre. He won't even come and look at them when they're finished—don't you think that's unkind?"

"Oh, please don't say that, Miss Prentiss!" the young man protested, still in that tone which seemed to Felix unnatural and "prissy." At the foot of the wide stairs he halted, and put a finger to his lips. "I don't know *really* whether I ought to show you the set—just yet. It's not *quite*—"

"I'm sure it's perfectly all right," the girl said firmly, and proceeded up the stairs. To Felix she continued over her shoulder: "It's a set for our 'Prince and Pauper'. I'm mad to see what it's like. Paul ought to do something quite stunning with it."

"But I've only got one scene done, you know," Paul objected. "And even that's uncertain, you understand; the idea for the whole thing—" he waved his hands helplessly; Felix noted that they were graceful hands and beautifully manicured—"hasn't quite *come* yet!"

He paused again, doubtfully, but the girl ran relentessly up the stairs. On the top floor she stopped in front of a door. "Now don't make any excuses, Paul, but just let us in."

Paul obediently opened the door, snapped on the lights, and they entered a room of which the walls were covered with tattered Persian rugs, the shelves sprinkled with curious bronze figures, and the floor, along one wall, lined with a row of books. In the centre of the room was a drawing-table. littered with scraps of gold and silver paper, coloured crayons, and tiny bottles of coloured inks. In the corner with a wire running down from the electric fixture in the ceiling, was a pot of glue. Felix walked over to the wall, glanced down at the row of books on the floor, and noted a set of the Yellow Book and an odd volume of the Savoy.

Paul had taken up a small model of a stage-set and was looking at it anxiously.

"Oh," the girl cried, "let me see!"

He put it into her hands, sat down at the drawing-table,

jumped up and turned on the current under his pot of glue, and sat down again, intent upon a pasteboard figure which he had taken from the tiny stage.

"Dear me, this is all wrong," he said in distress, stripping the tinsel from the figure. "How could I?"

"Look," the girl said to Felix, beckoning him with her head. "This is the palace scene. See—"

"Do take it over to your room to explain it," Paul said petulantly. "You distract me."

"Come," said the girl, and they entered the room on the other side of the hall. But in a moment Paul had followed them anxiously. "I must tell you that the colours here are not right," he said, hovering over the model, which the girl had set down on her table. "No blues—no blues at all! blues go in the next scene. Nothing but red and gold and black. And this arch will be different—more sombre. The throne higher—dwarfing the human figures. Very high—twenty inches, an inch to the foot, twenty feet high!"

"But Paul," said the girl, "you know our proscenium-arch is only twelve feet high!"

"I can't help that, my dear young woman," the young man replied with hauteur. "I know well enough that you'll ruin my beautiful scene. But in my mind— *Oh, pewter platter!*" His voice, uttering this preposterous exclamation, had become shrill, and he dashed to the door. "My glue-pot!" he cried, and disappeared.

The girl sat down and began to laugh. "Isn't he funny?" she said.

"Funny?" Felix echoed dubiously.

"But he does make nice stage-pictures anyway," she said.

Felix looked at the model. "But are these airs natural to him, or is he just putting them on to impress people? Where is he from?"

"Guess!"

Felix thought he saw a light. "London?"

The girl laughed again. "Arkansas," she said.

"What!"

"Yes, just as he is now, from Arkansas—glasses, accent,

Yellow Book and everything. I've a kind of notion why it is, if you'd like to hear it."

"I would."

"Then make yourself comfortable." She motioned toward the couch, which with its pillows was the only suggestion of ease in her rather bare and workmanlike room; a writing-table, a typewriter on its stand, and a long shelf of books, gave it an air quite different from the room across the hall. She drew over a chair for herself in front of the couch.

"Don't blame him," she said. "We're all a little like that—I mean, queer. I'm sure I seem quite as queer as that to my family down in Springfield. If you live in Arkansas, and want to make lovely stage-pictures, you *are* a freak; or you become one trying to keep from being dull like everybody else. It's inevitable."

"You frighten me," Felix said soberly. "Am I a freak? I suppose I am—but somehow I don't like the idea."

"Do you want to make a million dollars?"

"No, not at all."

"Then of course you're a freak." She laughed cheerfully.

"And what does Chicago think of—of us?" he asked.

"Oh, that's all right. Chicago is beginning to realize that it needs us. Chicago wants to be a metropolis. And all the stock-yards in the world won't make a metropolis. Enough of us, given a free-hand—can. And Chicago knows it. Just now we are at a premium here. We can be as crazy as we like!"

"I wonder?"

"You ought to have known the scenic genius who preceded Paul. Dick Bernitz, his name was. He was a wild one Gloom—despair—and, as it turned out, drugs. He came from Nevada. He affected evening clothes—wanted to wear them all day long, in fact! Baudelaire was his god. We were too tame for him. He left us, and starved and froze somewhere in the slums—still in his evening clothes; and got pneumonia and died. And Dick was—just a nice boy who wanted to do beautiful pictures and poems. Nevada did that to him."

"But— why blame Nevada?"

"His father was in real-estate. He wanted Dick to sell real-estate."

"Well, and after all, why not? One must do something ordinary—to make a living."

"Why didn't *you* do something ordinary? Why did you come to Chicago?"

Felix was silent.

"I've kind of got you bothered, haven't I?" said the girl maliciously.

"You've given me something to think about." He rose.

"But I haven't asked you yet what I was going to. Will you do a play for us?"

"I can't do plays!"

"Oh, yes, you can. You write poetry and stories and things, don't you?"

"Do I give myself away as plainly as that?"

The girl laughed. "You ought to know that an institution like this is a gathering place for idealists of all sorts and kinds. I know the chief varieties, and you aren't any of the sociological sorts, so you must be one of the artist kind. Besides, didn't I hear you talk at dinner?"

Felix grinned shamefacedly. "I didn't disguise myself very well," he admitted. "But anyway—"

He walked impatiently across the little room. His mind was in a state of strange upheaval. All his ideas about Chicago and himself were being upset. He ought not to listen to this girl. He must not let her confuse his plans. In particular he must not become interested in writing. He had put all that aside for the present.

His lips twisted in an uneasy grimace. Why, at this moment, when his mind must be braced to meet the impact of realities, should he let himself be drugged with the opium of dreams?

Already, at her mere word, the old numbing desire had come in a new guise—a vague, feverish yearning toward the puppet-world of the stage: fascinating half-formed ideas for plays rose like bubbles in his mind.

It was a feeling like home-sickness.

He must not indulge it. Of course, it would be fun to write a play for this girl, and help invent scenery and costumes for it. But that was not what he had come to Chicago for. He must put aside all enthusiasms which had no relation to the world of work-a-day reality. The very fact that he was so much interested in the idea proved that it was wrong. . . .

He saw now that it was foolish to have ever come to this place—this refuge for idealists and dreamers. The thought of hunting up a new lodging that night suggested itself; but of course it would be hard to find another place half so comfortable—and he must consider his very limited finances. . . .

"Anyway," he said, pausing in front of the girl, "I *won't* write you a play!"

"Oh, yes you will!" she said.

A knock, and the door burst open, and Paul rushed in with a new-made cardboard figure, dressed in gold tinsel. "At last!" he cried, holding it up. "This will be the key-note of the play!"

"Splendid!" cried the girl, glancing at it. "And now I'm going to take Mr. Fay down and show him our theatre."

As they went out, Felix noted on her door a card which revealed that her first name was Rose-Ann. It seemed a singularly fitting name for her, somehow.

V. The Struggle for Existence

I.

A STRANGE and perturbing girl! . . . He had not believed, he wished not to believe, what she had told him—that one could be fool and dreamer and yet make terms with Chicago.

But in the course of a few weeks it began to seem as if she were right.

Felix's other letter of introduction was to Mr. Clive Bangs, editorial writer on the Evening Chronicle. Very diffidently, after having made futile inquires at other newspapers during the week, he went one afternoon to present the letter.

Some one in the front office said, "Back there under the mezzanine—the first office to the right." He found a little built-in coop, and opened the door. The space inside was crowded with desks and tables, the floor littered with papers, the air filled with cigarette smoke. Through the windows, facing on an alley overhung by tall buildings, no sunlight came, and electric lamps on the desks pierced holes of light through the twilight atmosphere. At one of the desks a plump man lounged, smoking a cigarette. A long, lean man in shirt-sleeves was pounding a typewriter. A surly-looking young man with a careless Windsor tie, and a lock of hair that fell over one eye, sat at a third desk, reading a book.

The plump man looked up with a good-humoured smile, and Felix approached him, saying, "Mr. Bangs?" The plump man waved a hand towards the surly-looking youth. "That's Mr. Bangs," he said.

Mr. Bangs looked up, frowned at Felix, and said, "You want to see me?" He jumped up, and indicated a chair vaguely. "Wait a minute," he said, and taking up a type-

written sheet from his desk went hurriedly out of the office.

Felix looked at the chair. It was piled high with exchanges, so he remained standing. The plump man continued to smoke dreamily. The long, lean man thoughtfully wrote on. Felix waited. Mr. Bangs did not return.

It was, Felix felt uncomfortably, just what he had expected —it was silly to have come here with that letter.

He glanced down at the desk, saw the book which Mr. Bangs had been reading, noted the name on the cover, and picked it up with a sudden interest. He looked at the title page, the date; and then turned the leaves, tenderly, affectionately. . . .

He had quite forgotten Mr. Bangs, and the nature of his errand.

Mr. Clive Bangs, having handed the typewritten sheet to the foreman of the composing-room, walked back slowly. He knew very well who his visitor was. Helen's letter announcing his arrival was in his pocket. "He is," Helen had written him, "just as crazy as you are, Clive!" But he distrusted Helen's judgment. . . . It was one thing to welcome to Chicago one more of the too few sophisticated spirits of the mid-west; it was another to have on his hands some pale, gawky, helpless youth who had been falsely encouraged by country librarians in the notion that he could write! What seemed a prodigy out in Iowa might be merely one of the army of unemployed and unemployable here in Chicago. Clive had tried to help these prodigies before; and he knew that a painful addiction to the style of Ruskin, combined with egotism and a total lack of ideas, was no easy malady to cure. He rather flinched from the prospect of taking Helen's protégé in hand. . . . But, still—*"crazy as you are"*—Helen might know what she was talking about.

Stopping in the doorway, Clive looked at his problem in person. He had picked up that book—that H. G. Wells book. . . . Those were the days just before "Tono-Bungay," and the name of H. G. Wells was as yet cherished by only a few enthusiasts. Besides, this was the least known of H. G. Wells' writings, and one who might have heard of Wells as

a writer of pseudo-scientific yarns would be puzzled by it. Clive stood for a moment trying to gauge the quality of Felix Fay's response to the volume in his hand; then he went up to him.

Felix awoke to find Mr. Bangs standing beside him, and looking at him quizzically.

"I see you're looking at my latest Wells find," said Mr. Bangs.

"The first English edition! Where did you pick it up?" Felix asked. "In a second-hand store?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bangs. "Forty cents! At Downer's."

Felix laid the book down reverently. "I wonder," he said, "if they have any other Wells' things there. There's one of his books I've never been able to come across anywhere—'The Island of Doctor Moreau.' Do you know it?"

"I have the only copy I've ever seen in Chicago," said Clive Bangs. "I'll lend it to you."

"I wish you would," Felix said gratefully. "I found 'The Time Machine' in an old junk-shop in Port Royal last summer, and that made 'The Island of Doctor Moreau' the only thing of Wells' I hadn't read—I suppose you know 'Kipps'? And 'Love and Mr. Lewisham'?"

Mr. Bangs nodded. "This book," he said, indicating the volume on the desk, "isn't so well known as it might be." He took a cigarette and passed Felix the box with an unconscious gesture.

Clive Bangs had ceased to judge this young man. He had accepted him. After all, how many people were there in Chicago who had read "First and Last Things"? So it was, once upon a time, when two men met who had both read an obscure book of poems about Wine and Death by one Edward Fitzgerald.

Felix lighted his cigarette from Clive Bangs' match. "I brought my copy to Chicago with me," he said. "It's the only book I did bring."

Clive Bangs looked at his watch and picked up his hat. Suddenly Felix remembered, and put his hand, embarrassedly, in his pocket for his letter of introduction.

Clive Bangs laughed. "Never mind!" he said. "I know who you are. Come on, let's have a drink."

A few minutes later they were sitting in a barroom called "The Tavern," ordering ale with bitters, which Clive Bangs recommended as the specialty of the place.

"So you are Helen's wild young man from Iowa!" said Clive. "I wish Helen were here, and we three would get drunk together."

Felix was startled at the idea of Helen, the beautiful and condescending goddess of the library-shrine of his youth, getting drunk. . . .

Clive laughed. "Oh," he said, "I mean on ideas. Though for my part, after a hard day's work, it takes a little alcohol to put the practical part of my mind asleep and set free my imagination. My mind is disposed in layers. After the first drink I cease to be interested in politics and social reform. After the second I forget the girl about whom I happen to be worrying at the time. And with the third drink, I enter the realm of pure theory."

The tall glasses of ale were set before them.

"Here's to Utopia!" said Clive.

2

It was only when Felix had warmly parted from his new friend, and agreed to come over the next noon for lunch and a visit to Downer's, that he realized—with some chagrin—that he had failed to say anything to Mr. Clive Bangs about getting a job as a reporter on the Evening Chronicle.

In fact, he had fallen very neatly into the trap prepared for him by his own fatal temperament. He had given himself away at the very start. And Bangs, who appeared to indulge some theoretical and visionary traits as a relaxation to the sober work of helping get out a great daily newspaper, had enjoyed his moon-calfishness: but to what end?

Going back to his room at Community House, Felix gravely and dispassionately considered the question of what impression he had made. "On the one hand," he said to himself, "it is doubtless true that Mr. Bangs must enjoy

coming across another person who shares his own literary tastes. But, on the other hand, these tastes are in the nature of an avocation for him, and my possession of them proves nothing whatever as to my fitness for a newspaper job. Suppose he had happened to be enthusiastic about Japanese prints; suppose he had just bought a Kiyonaga, and I had looked at it and praised it; he would have been pleased to find some one who knew the difference between a Kiyonaga and a Kunisada—but would he have thought that a reason for helping me to get a newspaper job? I'm afraid not."

Felix was pleased with the coolness of his reasoning under circumstances where another person might have built up vain hopes. And in any event, Clive Bangs was a friend; and friendship had a value of its own. He would not embarrass Clive Bangs with any requests for help; he would take what their friendship had to give, and be glad of it.

Accordingly, it was without any ulterior motive that he went to lunch with Bangs next day. Again they talked literature and ideas; they explored Downer's together, and Felix picked up a second volume to complete his Muses' Library edition of the poems of John Donne: and they strolled back to the office of the Chronicle, where Felix became acquainted with the other editorial writers.

The long, lean man was a New Englander named Hosmer Flint; he corresponded very much to Felix's idea of what the editorial writer of a great daily newspaper should be, for he had a mind incredibly stored with statistics of all kinds. The other was the chief editorial writer—a man of fifty, plump and dimpled, with a childlike charm of manner which made it natural for every one to call him "Willie"—his other name being Smith.

Willie Smith genially expressed to Felix the hope that there might be something for him on the Chronicle, and when the managing editor happened in he introduced Felix to him casually as a young man who was looking for a newspaper job; but Felix understood that this was simply Willie's good nature, and refused to take the possibility seriously. He

found his new acquaintances agreeable to talk to, however, and fell into the habit of dropping into the editorial office in the slack part of the afternoon, for a half-hour's talk. Having no economic reason for pretending to be anything but himself in their presence, he talked about the things that really interested him—socialism and anarchism and life and art.

He permitted himself these idle pleasures only after hours dutifully spent in annoying the editors of five or six other papers with a brisk and efficient presentation of his usefulness. He had to appear so preternaturally capable and alert on these occasions that it was a relief to be able to throw off the disguise and loaf and invite his soul in the editorial room of the Evening Chronicle. It was, as he sometimes reproachfully told himself, a concession to his inborn weakness, and just so much time lost from his task of getting a newspaper job.

3

But one could not look for a job all the time. It was with only slight compunction that he fell into the custom of spending his evenings in the company of Rose-Ann—sometimes talking in her room, sometimes in Paul's watching him invent his beautiful and fantastic toy-scenery, and again in the tiny Community Theatre, helping them make costumes and build stage-sets.

It was, it seemed, to the fascination of the tiny theater itself, as much as to Rose-Ann's persuasions, that he presently succumbed, and found himself writing a little play for a group of children—a play about the further adventures of the Pied Piper and the boys and girls who followed him into the mountain. . . . He felt rather like one of those children himself, lured by some irresistible music away from the daylit world of ambition into the hollow hill of fantasy. . . . Rose-Ann approved the play enthusiastically, and the children of her group, assigning the parts among themselves, began spontaneously to learn it by heart.

Meantime, rehearsals of a sort were going on for the

"Prince and Pauper." Rose-Ann had her own way of teaching. She became, it seemed, herself a child, and was accepted by the others as such; they quarreled and made up with her, kissed her and made faces at her and petted her, exactly as if she were one of themselves; and Felix, watching these scenes, wished that he, too, had that capacity for childlikeness, so that he could join in the fun on such terms of innocent intimacy. But he felt dreadfully grown-up and awkward, and Rose-Ann, on her knees amid her playmates, laughing and talking and acting one part or another with the utter abandon of childhood's "pretending"—she was the youngest of them all; indeed, she seemed more than anything else a delightful doll—a marvellous talking and laughing doll of gold and ivory.

Mrs. Perkins—big, fat, comfortable Mrs. Perkins, still young-looking though reputed to be a grandmother, who lived in the neighborhood and came to the theater to sew costumes for them, and whom everybody, without any disrespect, called "Perk"—beckoned him over one day to her corner as he stood admiring Rose-Ann with her children, and whispered to him:

"You just feel like putting her in your pocket and carrying her off, don't you?"

Felix grinned at her. "How do *you* know?" he whispered back. Yes, she was a wonderful little toy-girl, less and more than human, that one wanted to hold and touch and play with, and take home to keep! But how did she, old Granny Perk, know how a young man felt about it!

"Oh, I know!" and Perk smiled her comfortable smile. "I was a girl myself once. Little Miss Rosy-Posy knows just how nice she looks to you, and don't you doubt it!"

Yes, perhaps Rose-Ann did like to be looked at and enjoyed by some one who was not a child. She seemed to be teasing him with her presence—to be saying, "Don't *you* want to come and play with me, too?"

He had tried to tell Clive about Rose-Ann, but his first words, "a girl over at Community House," had apparently evoked in Clive's mind the picture of a misguided spinster of

forty whose repressed maternal instincts were finding satisfaction in the running of other people's lives—a creature against whom he proceeded to warn Felix in humorous terms. "She will manage you, Felix," he said, "—for your own good. Now it's all right to be managed by a woman, so long as it is for her benefit. You can at least complain about it. But when you're managed for your own good, you are helpless."

Felix objected to this notion of Rose-Ann, but Clive asked her age. And Felix said he didn't know, but that she was a little older than himself.

"A little older than you. I thought so," said Clive. "Beware!" There was no use talking to Clive about girls, anyway; it was a subject upon which he was frequently bitter and always absurd. Felix had told Rose-Ann a little about him, and she had said, "He's been hurt by some girl." Doubtless that was true. And Felix felt a certain satisfaction in the inward comparison of this creature of Clive's distorted fancy with the real and delightful Rose-Ann—whom even as Clive talked he could see in memory, with himself standing by and caressing with his gaze every swift movement of that delicate and supple doll-body of hers.

"You're all wrong," he said to Clive. "She's a pagan."

"Yes," said Clive scornfully, "one of those settlement-house pagans."

Felix only laughed.

All this, however, was not getting a job. By desperate economies, as his money dwindled, he was managing to hold out. But he could not hold out forever. Clive had asked him one day if he needed money, and he had answered evasively. There was no use starting that sort of thing.

He had to get a job.

But it looked as though he were not going to get a job. There seemed to be no use trying to impress city editors with his efficiency. There had been a vacancy on a morning paper, and another young man—with, so far as Felix could tell, no better qualifications than his own—had been selected. That discouraged him. Doubtless these city editors could see through his pretences. . . .

4

And then one afternoon when he dropped in at the Chronicle office, Clive asked him if he was ready to go to work Monday morning: he had been taken on as a reporter. . . . He would get, Clive told him, twenty dollars a week to start with. Clive told him this in a pleased but casual way, as though it were something long arranged between Felix and himself which had just been ratified by the higher powers. So Clive had been working for him all along!

"Go and tell Harris you'll be on deck," said Clive. Harris was the city editor. "And better speak to the Old Man, too." The Old Man was the managing editor, Mr. Devoe. Felix had never supposed for a moment that these personages had him under consideration.

He presented himself before both of them, not knowing what to say. Apparently it was not necessary to say anything. Both of them were busy—too busy, Felix hoped, for them to notice how dazed he was.

"All right, Fay, you'll be here Monday morning at eight o'clock," said the city editor.

"I suppose Mr. Bangs told you that we're going to start you off at twenty dollars?" said Mr. Devoe. "We can do a little better later, perhaps. It's up to you." Mr. Devoe looked at him severely—or kindly, Felix was not sure which—over his glasses, and turned back to his desk.

"Yes, sir," said Felix.

Willie Smith patted him on the back. "Glad you've got it," he said.

"Take it easy," Clive told him. "A newspaper job in Chicago is just like a newspaper job anywhere else."

Well! So at last, somehow, the devil only knew how, he had gained a foothold in Chicago.

He discussed the event with Rose-Ann that evening. She laughed at his surprise. "How do you suppose people get jobs?" she demanded. "You were going at it in precisely the right way. I knew from what you told me they were going to take you."

Felix had already begun to worry about the future. "I don't know where any place is," he said. "I must dig up my street-map."

"Oh, throw that street-map away," said Rose-Ann. "I'll give you a guide to Chicago that's much more useful." She went to her shelf and took down a little book. "Here!"

It was the "Bab Ballads." Felix looked puzzled.

"If you can write a play that will please children, you can write to please the people of Chicago. They're children, too," she said.

Felix slipped the book in his pocket and went to his room and his street-map. She had too much confidence in him. Only he himself knew what a fool he was. He had got this job under false pretences.

VI. A Guide to Chicago

I

AND yet it seemed that Rose-Ann knew him better than he knew himself.

On Monday morning the city editor gruffly assigned him a desk. He hated to sit there idle, and he had thrown away his morning paper. Finding that he still had Rose-Ann's little book in his pocket, he took it out and read in that. Presently the city editor called his name. He rose, putting the book back into his pocket. His first test had come.

"Go over to the Annex and see if you can get something about the Taft-Roosevelt situation from—" and he named a distinguished political personage.

"Where?" Felix asked.

"At the Annex."

(But what in the world was the Annex? From the tone in which its name had been uttered by the city editor, Felix was aware that it was some place that he ought to know all about. Some place that anybody who had ever dreamed of being a reporter on a Chicago paper would of *course* know all about! But what was it? The Annex to what? . . . By a violent mental effort he came to the conclusion that it must be a hotel; probably one of Chicago's most famous hotels! and here he had been in Chicago a month, and didn't know where it was. Idiot!)

"Yes, sir," said Felix to the city editor, and went out and asked the policeman on the nearest corner. . . . It was horribly obvious to him, at that moment, that he was too ignorant of plain everyday reality ever to hold this job.

2

He came back, having failed to get the interview. . . . He had been given half an hour by a delightful old gentleman at the Annex; half an hour in which to try to get some kind of quotable political comment on a situation in which everybody was interested, from a man who, if any one, knew what the situation really was. And every question had been turned aside so cleverly, so smoothly, so genially, that under other circumstances it would have been a pleasure to see it done. The old gentleman had been the soul of courtesy; he seemed to enjoy talking to his young questioner; doubtless because it was so easy to put him off the track.

At first Felix's questions had been straightforward; and the evasiveness of the replies had disconcerted him. He framed his questions more shrewdly; but the old gentleman answered them with the same bland courtesy and to precisely the same effect. Felix kept on for a while, doggedly. And then gradually he realized—what, he told himself scornfully, he should have known from the very start, that he had been sent out on a futile quest. If there had been the slightest chance of getting anything out of this old gentleman, the best reporter on the staff would have been sent—not the newest and greenest cub.

He was angry—at himself, for having tried so naïvely to do the impossible; at the city editor, for not giving him a real assignment; at the tradition of "news," which, having attached a fictitious importance to the subject of politics, was wasting his time and the old gentleman's in this solemnly idiotic fashion.

"Is there anything else I could tell you about?" the old gentleman asked blandly.

"You have been very kind—" said Felix.

"Oh, not at all," said the old gentleman. "Nothing pleases me more than to give information to a young seeker after truth."

"There *is* one thing I would like to know," said Felix. "Who struck Billy Patterson?"

This insulting question—insulting precisely because it was silly, because it threw the whole earnest interview suddenly into the key of farce—did not for an instant shake the old gentleman's aplomb. He appeared to reflect gravely, with finger-tips delicately joined and head cocked on one side, in his characteristic gesture. He smiled faintly, and spoke.

"You have trenched," he said, "upon an important public issue, and one not lightly to be discussed—a question of deep interest to hundreds of thousands of our fellow-countrymen. In fact, I have seldom been in any gathering of true Americans, when this question has not been raised. *Who struck Billy Patterson?* Again and again have I heard men ask each other that question. And how seldom, if ever, has the reply been satisfactory! No, I say frankly to you, the reply has not been satisfactory. And so the question remains —like Banquo's ghost, it will not down. Careless and unthinking statesmen may try to lead the people astray with talk of minor issues, such as the tariff, imperialism, and the conservation of natural resources, but the heart of the American people remains true. When the shouting and the tumult dies, and the senators go back to Washington, common men look at each other and ask, *Who struck Billy Patterson?* It is a question that searches to the very vitals of our polity. We boast of our unexampled freedom, our magnificent opportunities; and rightly so. But justice, even-handed and sure, is the true foundation of a lasting prosperity. We know this, and we are humble before the Muse of History. Be it said in our behalf that others have not had to prod at our sleeping consciences. It is not because of outside criticism that we trouble ourselves over this matter. The Frenchman and the Turk do not point the finger of scorn at us; and even our brothers across the sea, speaking our own language, are probably ignorant of William Patterson's very name. But we do not forget. And whatever happens, so long as this question remains unanswered, I venture to predict that no other issue will usurp its place; and on the heart of the last American will be written the solemn words: *Who struck Billy Patterson?* Is there anything else?"

So the old gentleman could play that game, too!

"Well," said Felix, "I *was* going to ask you if—if you thought McPhairson Conglocketty Angus McClan got a square deal, but—"

The old gentleman shook his head, still smiling.

"I really don't think it would be proper," he said, "for me to discuss the internal affairs of the British Empire."

"And Noah's Ark," said Felix. "If you could express an opinion—"

"It might be construed as a reflection upon the naval policy of the new adminstration."

"And as to what became of little Charley Ross?"

"That," said the old gentleman, "is something the national committee would prefer to remain, for the present, a secret."

Felix was beaten.

"Thank you," he said, and went away.

"Got anything?" the city editor asked, when Felix came up to his desk to report.

"Not a thing," Felix said.

The city editor grunted, reached out for a typewritten sheet on the hook, and seemed to dismiss the matter from his mind.

Felix went back to his desk and sat there idly. He took out Rose-Ann's little book from his pocket, and read in it. And then suddenly he put a sheet of paper in his machine and commenced to write.

Confound it, if what Rose-Ann said about the people of Chicago was so, they would enjoy the true story of that interview. It *was* funny. Funny just because it was silly. But it was so preposterously the opposite of what he had been sent to find out —it seemed a deliberate mockery of the traditional and legitimate curiosity of the public. If he ventured to show it to the city editor, it would probably be his last assignment.

Recklessly, he wrote it.

The city editor strolled to the water-tank, and back, wiping his lips. He saw Felix writing, came over, put a hand on his shoulder, and asked, "What are you writing?"

Well, he was lost. There was no backing out now. He handed over the first sheets.

"Thought you didn't get anything," the city editor remarked.

"I—didn't," said Felix.

"Where's the rest of it?"

Felix wrote the last sentence, and surrendered the page.

"He said this?" asked the city editor, pausing for a moment. Felix nodded. "Just like the old bird, too," the city editor muttered, and went on reading. He read to the end, and then read the first page again, and then smiled amiably. "And you didn't know you had a story!" he said.

"Well," said Felix, still incredulous. "I didn't think—"

"You're sure you've got it right?" the city editor asked, rubbing his chin.

"Every word," said Felix, earnest in behalf of his veracity.

"H'm," said the city editor. "With a little fixing up, I think we've got a nice little story here." He carried it into the managing editor's room.

And to Felix's great astonishment the story, with a few changes, was printed on the first page, under a solemnly ironic heading. . . . They were laughing about it in the editorial room when he ventured in that afternoon to see Clive. "So you had a story and didn't know it!" Willie said delightedly.

"Never mind," Clive told him, "you've made a hit with Harris by letting him discover the story for himself." Clive really seemed to think he had played a kind of trick on Harris. "The regular cub trick," said Clive.

Felix showed the story to Rose-Ann that night.

She was pleased, but not surprised. "It's exactly the sort of thing I expected you to do," she said.

He was tempted to tell Rose-Ann the truth about it; but he decided not to. Let her keep on believing in him—while she could!

VII. Work and Play

I

FELIX kept the little book in his desk, cultivated what he called the "Bab Ballad manner," and waited, scepti-cally, to see how long his luck would last. In three weeks he was given a raise. But even this did not quite convince him.

It had been too easy—too astonishingly easy. It had come about, not because of any change in his character, not because he had ceased in some miraculous way to be a moon-calf, but precisely because he was just as much a moon-calf as ever. That was why he was compelled to suspect the authenticity of his good fortune.

"Stop worrying," Clive told him one day at lunch. "What in the world are you afraid of?"

"That I'll wake up," said Felix.

"You'll wake up, all right," said Clive, "to discover that you're being underpaid and overworked just like everybody else. You know, you go along looking as if you had had a telegram saying that your rich uncle in Australia had died and left you a million dollars, and you didn't know whether to believe it or not. No one would guess to look at you that this remarkable good fortune of yours simply consists of eight or ten stiff hours a day for twenty-five dollars a week."

This, to Felix, seemed an understatement of the merits of the situation. For one thing, he had become very much attached to Clive, whose odd, whimsical, theoretical conver-sation had a tang of its own; and this job on the Chronicle yielded him the opportunity to enjoy Clive's company, though now on somewhat restricted terms.

Since Felix had become a reporter, taking his place as it were in the ranks of a lower caste, he had begun to feel that

his visits to the editorial room were a kind of special privilege, which he endeavored to justify by an occasional piece of writing suited to the editorial page—some entertaining account of things seen in Chicago, the by-products of his work as a reporter. Or, more likely, things not seen at all, but pieced together out of his memory and hung on the slightest thread of contemporary incident. . . . Once he attended a meeting of "aurists," and, with a reference to that meeting as a starting point, meandered through a column of odd and curious lore about ears: the ear as the organ of stability, by means of which we are enabled to stand upright —with the story of the little crustacean which puts sand in its ears, and upon whom some scientist played a mean trick, substituting iron filings for the sand-grains, and then applying a magnet overhead, with the result that the crustacean swam contentedly upside down! . . . In short, anything that happened to interest him!

He discovered that these writings gave him a special standing among his fellow-reporters. They had never ventured to aspire to the editorial page. Nor would Felix have ventured, except that he knew from loafing about the editorial room how welcome was an occasional column from the outside. He still felt himself to be an intruder into a superior realm, and he was grateful for those times, once or twice a week, when Clive stopped beside his desk and suggested that they lunch together.

He had wondered at first how it was that Clive Bangs, with a passion for ideas as intense as the one Felix had long been endeavoring to overcome within himself, should be a successful editorial writer on Chicago's most conservative and respectable paper—and, for that matter, the valued committeeman of two or three eminently practical and sober reform organizations! Clive was not merely a moon-calf like himself; he was at the same time a quite sane and work-a-day young Chicagoan.

The thought of such an adjustment to the world fascinated and tantalized Felix. It held out for him the possibility of getting along successfully without going through any such

violent psychic revolution as he had demanded of himself, Clive was inwardly an Anarchist, a Utopian, a theorist and dreamer of the wildest sort; and outwardly something quite other.

That outward quality was what Felix envied in Clive—that practical adaptability to the world, so far beyond anything that seemed possible for Felix himself to achieve. He would have given much for Clive's ease of manner, his ability to meet ordinary people on their own ground—as for instance in discussing the Yale-Harvard game with a college boy and an instant later local politics with a "reform" alderman who stopped in turn by their table in the City Club. At such a moment Felix was struck dumb; he felt like a child in the presence of grown-up people. Clive seemed to him an infinitely superior being.

And yet this practical adaptability to human occasions was a trait upon which Clive himself seemed to set no value. His easy worldliness—as Felix thought it—was only one side of his character; and he preferred to indulge the other side—the side that was fantastically idealistic.

Perhaps it was because Felix had felt obliged to carry all his theories into practice, that some bounds had been set to his theorizing. No such bounds existed for Clive Bangs. The most extreme ideas that Felix had ever timidly cherished with regard to some free and happy society of the future, were commonplaces to Clive. His speculations roved boldly into Platonic, Nietzschean, and H. G. Wellsian spheres, and dwelt there as among solid realities.

They talked chiefly of love—of love in the future.

Sometimes Felix, too much allured and disturbed, had to protest that these were, after all, only dreams. One day at lunch Clive discoursed on freedom in love until Felix felt constrained to point out that human nature being what it is, jealousy—whether one liked it or not—was nevertheless a fact.

"Oh, yes," Clive laughed. "I realize that the red-haired young woman at the settlement would find it difficult not to be jealous! In that sense, of course jealousy is a fact,

and has to be taken into consideration. But we are free men at present, dealing with ideas, not with Jane and Sue —and as free men we are at liberty to inquire what kind of fact jealousy is. Witchcraft, too, was a fact—soberly attested by the greatest thinkers of the age. Anybody who didn't believe in witchcraft was crazy, just like you and I. And jealousy is the same kind of fact—a socially-created fact. People are persuaded that it exists—that under certain circumstances it must exist. That's all. How would I know when to be jealous, except that I am carefully taught what my rights of possession are and when they are infringed? It's the old barbaric code, still handed down in talk and writing. And that's why I am interested in the development of a new kind of talk and writing."

It was specifically as this "new kind of talk and writing" that Clive discussed modern literature. He repudiated any preoccupation with literature as an art. It was to him a kind of social dynamics. It had been used to build up through the ages a vast system of "taboos"—and now it was being used to break them down again. In this work of sociol iconoclasm the chiefs were H. G. Wells, Shaw and Galsworthy—with Meredith as a breathless and stammering forerunner and Hardy as a blind prophet. . . .

"Do you suppose the public knows what they are really up to?" Felix asked doubtfully.

"No. And it would hang them if it did. But fiction cuts deeper than any kind of argument. And it's doing its work. Wait ten years. . . . The new younger generation won't be like us, Felix—content to orate about these matters at luncheon. They will despise us, Felix! They will say we did nothing but talk."

"Quite right, too," said Felix.

"They will have heard our talk—talk—talk, and they will be sick of it. They will be all for action. And you and I, Felix, who will then be respectably married, you to your settlement Egeria and I to God knows whom, will be shocked at the younger generation. We will remember how prayerfully we planned to be unconventional, in what a mood of

far-seeing social righteousness we went about breaking the commandments, and how, after all, we stopped on the way to discuss the matter more thoroughly, and ended by never doing anything at all—and we will be disgusted by the light-minded frivolity of those youngsters. Even our novels—instead of corrupting the youth of the land as we hope!—will probably be regarded by them as hopelessly old-fashioned. If we ever actually write them. . . ."

When he had reached that point in the discussion, Clive would become silent and sullen. "If I only had the energy to write!" he would complain bitterly.

He had been brooding over a novel for four years, and had not yet written a word of it. . . . They had long talks about that unwritten novel which was to corrupt the younger generation.

2

At Community House, Felix was having difficulties with his class. Not that they were lacking in enthusiasm; on the contrary, their enthusiasm carried him in directions where he had no intention of going. At the outset, he had conceived English composition to be a simple matter. Perhaps it might have been for children; but these young people of eighteen were already convinced of its difficulties, and haggled over semicolons. They wanted to know the "rules" by the observance of which one became a good writer!

Felix presently gave up prose as too hard to teach, and started in upon verse, with greater success. Yet when it came to explaining why *love* and *rove* are technically correct rhymes, and *young* and *son* no rhymes at all, he was nonplussed. Very soon the class had hit upon a mode which was neither verse nor prose—a kind of free verse It was quite other than Felix had any wish to encourage anybody to write. He doubted if the writing of free verse would ever enable them to appreciate the Ode to a Nightingale. But he was helpless in the situation, and could only let them go ahead.

His conception of verse was precisely that it was not free;

he had thought that the pains and pleasures of rhyme and metre would give them a creative understanding of English poetry. This free verse of theirs seemed to him utterly unrelated to the tradition into which he sought to give them an insight. It was very free verse indeed—it mixed its metaphors recklessly, it soared into realms of vague emotion. And when its meaning was at all clear, it carried the burden of a hopeless reproach against circumstance, and a plaintive yearning for it knew not what. Felix fiercely disliked this plaintive hopelessness, and preached scornfully at his class. They seemed to be impressed; but they continued as before.

"I can't believe you really feel like that," he said to a merry-faced young Jewess who had just read aloud a poem full of world-sorrow.

She looked offended. "But I do!" she cried. "If you only knew!" and she put her hand expressively to her bosom.

"My God!" he said. "What a broken-hearted crowd!"

There was a quick burst of laughter, and then a girl spoke up. "But Mr. Fay, do you not think we *feel?*"

"I know you feel unhappy. But don't you ever feel anything else? Don't you ever have a good time? Or don't you think good times are worth writing about?"

"Did Keats and Shelley write about their good times?" asked an ironical youth.

"Yes," said Felix defiantly. "They wrote about lucent syrops tinct with cinnamon, and skylarks, and things like that; and they loved them to begin with—that was why they wrote about them. Don't you love anything—anything that is right on hand to be loved—babies, or pet kittens, or pretty clothes, or pretty girls? Are you always pining for something you haven't got?"

"Always!" two or three of them responded impressively in chorus.

"The desire of the moth for the star," the ironical young man contributed.

"See here," said Felix. "Shelley was a young aristocrat

with an income, living luxuriously in Italy, and he could afford to be unhappy." They laughed, but Felix went on earnestly. "He could afford to be devoted to something afar from the sphere of his sorrow, because his sorrow consisted of the fact that after eloping with two girls, he couldn't elope with a third and have a perfectly clear conscience. Added to the fact that he knew, if he did, he would be tired of her in a few weeks anyway. He had tried it before, and he knew. That was what Shelley's sorrow was all about, and if any one here present is in the same situation, I grant that he is entitled to feel that the desire for happiness is the desire of the moth for the star. But for ordinary mortals like ourselves, happiness is no such impossible thing. It is not the desire of the moth for the star, but—" he hesitated, and the ironical youth broke in with:

"The desire of the moth for the candle-flame!"

"And suppose that it is!" said Felix. "What is life anyway, except a burning of ourselves up in action? Only I don't see why you prefer such tragic figures of speech. Why not—"

The ironical youth interrupted again: "The desire of the caterpillar for the cabbage-leaf!"

"I give you up!" said Felix.

But he learned from Rose-Ann that his class was considered by the residents a real success. And fat old Mrs. Perk, one evening at the tiny theatre, said to him: "I hear you're making poets out of the boys and girls. They say you're a grand teacher!"

It was very odd: it seemed to make no difference that they could not take what he wanted to give them, or that he did not want to give them what they were getting; the class was a success anyway!

"Who was telling you?" he asked.

"That David Arenstein," she told him. "The one that always used to be talking about committing suicide." David was the ironical youth who had quoted Shelley at him. "But he's far from committing suicide now—" and she

smiled her comfortable smile. "He's going to be married. Oh, yes, he comes and tells me all his troubles."

Felix laughed. "I hope he doesn't hold me to blame!"

She shook her head. "Well, you'll be getting married yourself, pretty soon, I suppose?"

He did not venture to challenge her as to whom. But he said, "What in the world makes you think that?"

"Oh," she said, "young folks do, sooner or later, I've noticed."

3

It was nonsense, of course. He was in no position to think about such things, at all. And as for Rose-Ann, he had in the course of weeks become as it were acclimated to her loveliness, so that it no longer tormented him as at first. He was secretly proud of his imperturbability. And if Rose-Ann's companionship had lately grown more disturbing than ever, it was for a very different reason. It was because of her flattering and at the same time annoying expectations of him as an artist—a poet—a creator. He attempted to deny any pretensions of this sort; he tried to evade any discussion of art at all. But they had formed the habit of going to the theater together, and he found it impossible to resist talking with her about how plays should be written.

"Why don't you write a really-and-truly play?" she asked, one night on their way back to the Community House.

He attempted to turn the question aside. "Hawkins is writing one, according to office gossip," he said. Hawkins was the young dramatic critic of the Chronicle.

"Well, if Hawkins can write a play—!" she said.

"All right," he assented cheerfully, "I'll wait and see if Hawkins can!"

"Don't be silly," she said. "You know what I think, Felix?"

"I never have any idea what you're going to think. What is it this time?"

"I think you've had your feelings hurt, somehow, back where you came from. In regard to writing. Something has made you afraid to show what you can do."

There was something quaintly maternal in her manner which almost took the sting out of that word *afraid*. But Felix hardened. "Well, why don't *you* write a play?" he countered.

"Don't be brutal, Felix. You know—and I know—that I'm not up to it. I can do little things. I can't do a big thing. And you can."

"It's nice of you to be so sure, Rose-Ann. But I'm not. Or rather, I'm pretty sure I *can't*. So there."

"Why do you say that? It's not true, and you know it."

He wished Rose-Ann had not become so serious. They were walking home through one of the first winter snows. A little while ago she had thrown a fluffy snowball at him, and threatened to wash his face, reproaching him for not being enough of a child. This was even more embarrassing. He had an absurd fear that she would commence to talk to him about his soul. . . . This was coming dangerously near to it. He scuffed up the soft snow with his feet, while she looked sidewise at him waiting for a reply.

"Rose-Ann, you make me uncomfortable," he said at last. "This business of having some one 'believe' in you isn't what it's cracked up to be in the romances. It—it's a damned nuisance. I'd be perfectly happy if you didn't come to me with your preposterous demands. I'm not the young genius in 'The Divine Fire.' I'm a reporter on a Chicago newspaper. Of course I want to write a play. Every young reporter wants to, I suppose. And of course, since you insist upon it, I think I could. But what of that? Every young reporter thinks the same thing."

"Why this pretence of modesty, Felix? You're scared, that's all."

"Scared of what?" he demanded angrily.

She answered slowly, as though she had just discovered the reason. "Of letting people know your real ambitions."

"Of making a silly fool of myself," he muttered.

"But where's the harm?" she continued. "Suppose they did know? Suppose everybody knew all your secret dreams? Would that be so terrible? Do you think everybody is watching you, ready to laugh at you? You're afraid of being laughed at, that's the trouble. . . . Well, I know your secret, Felix, and I don't laugh."

He shrugged his shoulders. It was intolerable that she should think she knew his secret. "What if I do want to write plays? I want to write novels, and poems, and lots of other things. And if I had nothing else to do, perhaps I'd try my hand at them all. But my main concern now is to make a living."

"Still worried about your job? Not really?"

"Yes, really. How do I know how long this fool stunt of mine is going to please the Chronicle? I haven't done a single piece of straight reporting since I've been on the paper. And I know no more of the real Chicago—"

"Felix, you *are* absurd!"

VIII. Rose-Ann Goes Away

I

ROSE-ANN had suddenly become a problem. In spite of everything he was falling in love with her. He criticized her to himself, harshly. She was a daughter of the bourgeoisie—a sort of madcap and runaway daughter, it was true, adventuring by herself in Chicago for a while, but destined, he told himself, after the flare of this rebellion had burned itself out, to return to the bourgeois fold. What else could she do? She was not an artist—or not enough of an artist—to face the world alone. She wrote a little, cleverly, but with no sustained strength; and what she wrote was inferior to what she thought and felt. She was one of those people who might have been, and never would be, writers; and the reason was, as Felix saw it, in her bringing up. Some softness had intervened between her and reality; she could see reality truly, far more truly than he could; but its sharp edges had never hurt her, it seemed; her mind had never been rowelled by the spur of painful experience. That was it. She had never been hurt enough; and one who has not been hurt has no need of the artist's revenge—the act of re-creation by which he triumphs over pain. She had disliked her world; not profoundly, but a little; and she had changed it sufficiently by the mere act of coming to Chicago and living in a settlement house and playing with costumes and scenery. That would content her—would more than satisfy her rebellious impulses. She talked of herself as one of the "queer" people of the settlement; but she wasn't. She would go back, and this period of her life would provide her a fund of humorous reminiscence at bourgeois dinner parties in Springfield, Illinois, where she would be, no doubt, quite

a figure. Paul, with his "pewter-platter" manner Dick, the boy who had fled from Community House and died of pneumonia in the slums, and himself, would quaintly adorn her reminiscences. . . . So Felix argued against her to himself; and it was easy enough to say all these things about her when she was not there to deny them by her every word and gesture.

In her presence he could not think these things. She was a seeker like himself—imperfect like himself, but utterly sincere—a comrade in the very simple and obvious adventure of making the most out of life. . . . Why was he so suspicious of her? Was it because he had vaguely heard that her people were well-to-do? She was not to blame for that! She was herself. There seemed no reason to distrust her.

But these arguments sufficed to discourage any tendency to romanticize her. She was less a wonderful person to him now than a dangerous person. Dangerous only in the sense that she might make a fool of him. Her friendliness was almost more than mere friendliness, and it took an effort to adjust himself to it. If he had been less susceptible, he might have taken the relationship more easily for what it was. If, for example, he could only have put his arm around her shoulder with an authentic brotherliness! But he was afraid to. No, there was the possibility of his making a romantic damned fool of himself about her, and being laughed at—or perhaps gently chided, it was hard to tell which would be worse. He could run the risk of that; or he could stiffly keep his distance, and suffer an occasional sisterly caress without returning it. He preferred to keep his distance.

Yet there were times when all this seemed an absurd affectation. They would be sitting, he sprawled on her couch and she rather primly upright in her chair, discussing something, when suddenly it would occur to him that they were only pretending to be adults, only making-believe at this intellectual game—that they were really only boy and girl, with the ancient and traditional interest of

boy and girl in each other. He would watch her as she bent forward, with her curious little eager frown, intent upon making herself clear; and then he would note his own attitude, tense with apparent interest in what was being said. "Hypocrites!" he would address himself and her in his mind. "I want to kiss you—and you want to, too. And we don't. Isn't it absurd!" And meantime he answered her arguments aloud. "Little liar!" he would be saying to her in his mind, "If I came over and put my arms about you—!" But he remained where he was. . . . And then, as suddenly, that tender and humorous insight into the situation would vanish, and she would appear to him an alien—an interesting young woman, but a complete stranger—and he would be glad he had not done anything silly.

2

Then, in the midst of the preparations for the Christmas performance of "The Prince and the Pauper," when everything was being rushed to its conclusion, and everybody interested in the play was sitting up all night to work on costumes or scenery, and the children were forgetting their lines or getting them mixed with lines rashly learned from Felix's Pied Piper play, there came an interruption.

One evening Rose-Ann did not come down to dinner, and he heard one of the residents say something about somebody in Springfield being ill, and Rose-Ann's being called home.

Knocking at her door, he found Rose-Ann packing and dressing for the journey. Her mother was ill. She was taking the train for Springfield in half an hour.

"Can I help you?"

"You can see me to the train if you want to. Come back in about ten minutes and I'll be ready."

He had the feeling that this was the last he would see of her. . . .

She explained the situation as they taxied in to the

station. Her mother's illness, she was sure, was nothing serious. She was annoyed at being telegraphed for. It would upset the plans for the Christmas play. Miss Clark would be put in charge of her group, and spoil everything. The telegram was just a trick to get her back home for the holidays. And yet—"Curious!" she said, "I never get along with my mother, and I don't believe there's anything the matter with her, and yet I'm as worried over this telegram as if I were the most dutiful daughter in the world. . . . The worst of going back home is, I shall be with the whole family—especially my brothers. They'll want me to stay there. They don't approve of my being alone in Chicago. They're just using mother as a means of getting me into their clutches. They've tried it before. And when I find that it's simply mother's annual 'spell,' I'll tell them all what I think of them and Springfield and the furniture business—and come back. I've made these flying trips three times now. . . . And yet I *am* worried."

Felix reflected that she would never get free from these family claims—that whatever she tried to do, she would be always called back to Springfield, and would obey the call. She would spend her whole life in a vain attempt to be something besides a daughter and sister of people who were inimical to all her wishes; until finally she surrendered to them. . . . He had the sense of hiding these hostile feelings from the swift friendly glance with which she looked to him for sympathy.

They had just time to catch the train. Felix gave her suitcase to the porter, and she took his hand. "Be good while I'm gone, Felix," she said. "Don't do anything awfully foolish. Good-bye." She leaned to him and kissed him—a timid little kiss. And then they were clinging to each other in a stunned and breathless embrace, as if they had been flung violently into each other's arms; they kissed, with a rude, strong, almost painful passion,—a kiss that hurt and could not hurt enough to satisfy them, and then become infinitely tender. It was a kiss that sought

to annihilate time and space, to make them remember it and what it meant forever.

"'Bo-o-o-ard!" said the conductor, and took Rose-Ann's elbow and put her firmly on the step. She turned and smiled back at Felix, and the train started.

Book Two

Canal Street

IX. How to Spend One's Evenings

I

FELIX began the task of forgetting—a task for youth in its most fantastically stern mood:—of trying to forget that unforgettable moment on the station platform with Rose-Ann. Or at least, to behave as though it had not occurred. For he was convinced that neither of them had intended it to occur.

It was obviously an accident—the mere mood of parting. It had meant nothing. It must be ignored.

But it was hard to ignore. It was a moment to which memory would recur. It dramatized vividly for him the fact—to which he sought to adjust himself—of Rose-Ann's absence.

Rose-Ann's absence made a great deal of difference, it seemed—and not only to himself. What she had predicted in regard to her dramatic class came true very quickly. Under Miss Clark's fussy direction, all the fun was taken out of the work for everybody. Mrs. Perk looked on the altered face of things with an air of wry disapproval, and whispered to Felix, "Oh, it's not the same place at all any more!" The children were listless. Paul froze into a silent rage at some unfortunate remark of Miss Clark's about his scenery and left Community House, and Felix began to stay away from the rehearsals altogether.

He wrote these things to Rose-Ann, and received brief replies which showed how remote all these matters had now become to her. He accepted the probability that Springfield had captured her for good and all this time. It was true that she always inquired in a friendly way about the things in which they had both been interested; but these weekly inquiries were tinged with a kind of faint retrospec-

tive glamour, as though to her these interests were already invested with the pathos of distance. She was evidently saying good-bye to her moment of freedom.

Felix did not tell her how much he missed her. He was rather ashamed of the fact. There was something intellectually disgraceful about a state of dependence upon one person for companionship. . . .

It was true, he had Clive. But he had been neglecting Clive, and now Clive had other concerns. Clive had several times urged him to come out over the week-end to Woods Point, where he was undertaking to spend the winter in his summer cottage, and Felix had always had some engagement with Rose-Ann which prevented his going. Now, when he would be glad to accept such an invitation, it was not renewed; Clive, it appeared, was so much interested in some girl that he had no time to spare for Felix. And Clive was the only person about the office that he cared for; at Community House since Rose-Ann had gone, there was no one. He wished that he had taken the trouble to make a few more friends. It made all the difference in the world to have some one to talk to at the day's end, some one to share one's thoughts with. . . .

Suddenly he began to find Community House intolerable. He spent his evenings looking for a place to live. Certainly he could not be less lonely anywhere else! And one evening, on Canal Street, in a dingy building which had apparently once been a residence and was now rented out room by room, he found a tiny hall-room on the third floor which he had not the excuse of not being able to afford. He made some explanation for leaving Community House—which it seemed was not needed, for room there was much in demand—and moved at once into his new home.

It was a room about eight by eleven feet, hardly holding the cot-bed, table and chair, which constituted its furnishing. He improvised a shelf above the tiny radiator in the corner for his half-dozen books. . . . And for one evening he was

happy, in being away from Community House, in being in a place of his own, in having in some way established his independence.

And then loneliness descended upon him in a black mist, obliterating the clear outlines of the actual world. He managed to get through the day's work somehow, and then he wandered about hopelessly, unseeingly, the victim of a longing that made the very act of breathing a pain; a longing that he could not undertand—for what was Rose-Ann to him?

2

He dined in various restaurants in the loop, in the vague hope of finding some one to talk to.

One evening, as he stood in a restaurant looking about for an empty table, he heard his name called. A young man, sitting alone, was beckoning to him. It was Eddie Silver, a reporter of whom Felix had been hearing much of late.

"Come over and congratulate me," he said, grinning, "I've just been fired!"

"Really? What for?" Felix asked.

"Coming down to the office crazy drunk," said Eddie Silver proudly. "Sit down."

Felix had heard of Eddie Silver's epic drunkennesses. Another thing he had heard was that Eddie Silver wrote poetry. . . . This was not so rare a thing among Chicago reporters as Felix would have supposed. Two in every dozen young reporters, as Clive had said, were poets of a sort. But, as Clive had added, it was always of a tame and colourless sort. Eddie Silver was not tame and colourless, whatever his poetry might be. Or rather there was nothing tame about the Eddie Silver legend—though its hero had appeared to Felix, whenever they met, to be the gentlest soul alive.

Eddie Silver was having a dinner which consisted mostly of cocktails; but he showed no signs of any of the alcoholic belligerency for which he was famed; he seemed, on the

contrary, likely to burst into tears at any moment. He was in a soft poetic mood. He talked about poetry. He tried to recite it. But the lines kept getting mixed up.

"Come on over my place," he said, "we'll read some Swinburne."

He took Felix to a large furnished room a little to the north of the loop, and propping himself on a couch with pillows, read "Poems and Ballads" in a sonorous and unintelligible manner until midnight. He invited Felix to come back the next evening for more Swinburne, and Felix went away feeling that the legend had rather overemphasized the belligerent side of Eddie Silver's character. . . . He came the next evening, which was spent in precisely the same manner, ending with an invitation to come in tomorrow evening for still more Swinburne.

Felix wondered if Eddie Silver read Swinburne every night.

Coming the third time, he found Eddie Silver's room occupied by half a dozen young men all more or less drunk.

"C'm' on in!" Eddie Silver called from the couch, where he sat propped with pillows as before, with a book in one hand and a glass in the other. "On'y two bo'l's o' Swinburne left!"

He rose, and poured a glassful of whiskey for Felix.

Felix looked at the huge drink with an involuntary gesture of dismay.

"'S all right," said Eddie Silver. "Nas'y stuff, I know! But you take it 'n' you'll feel better right away!"

Felix had never been drunk. He had never wanted to be drunk. But it occurred to him that now was the proper time to have that experience.

He looked about the room. All these half dozen people were in that state, so eloquently described by the poets, of being "perplexed no more with human and divine."

One of them was telling an incoherent story, and two others were laughing in the wrong place and being told indignantly that that wasn't the point at all. Another was singing to himself, and not doing it very well. Poor devil!

he probably wanted to sing and nobody would let him except when he was drunk. And still another was arguing with Eddie Silver, who paid no attention to him whatever, about somebody named John. "John means well," he explained, with the air of one who understands all and forgives all. "John just don't know how, that's all! But he means well."

Felix considered. Did he really wish to join them in that state, so merely ridiculous when viewed from the outside? Yet they were doubtless happy, in some way which he, in his inexperience, knew nothing about. Well, he would try it. He would get drunk.

And he might as well do it quickly.

He drank half the glassful down, choked, and was slapped on the back. He waited.

He was surprised, and a little disappointed, to find that it had no further effect than the same gentle exhilaration he had experienced from an evening's slow sipping of his friend Tom Alden's Rhine wine. That was not what he wanted. That was not enough. He braced himself, and drank the rest of the glassful.

Some hours later he was awakened from a deep and peaceful sleep on the floor of the bathroom by two of his companions, and walked out of the house. . . . He felt refreshed by the night air, and remembered a discussion about Chicago, and of slapping somebody's face. He did not remember being knocked down—several times, they said. By a man named Smith. He did not remember Smith.

"And every time," they told him gleefully, "you got up and solemnly slapped his face again. You said you wouldn't allow anybody to talk that way about Chicago. . . . And you kept calling him 'McFish.'"

His companions were taking him home. He thanked them extravagantly, and tried to give them directions, but they explained that they lived in the same building he did —a fact which at the time he found very puzzling. Nevertheless they affirmed that it was so.

He got up two flights of stairs without assistance, and

opened his door, but immediately became overcome with sleep, and sank on the couch. They pulled off his shoes and left him. . . .

At seven o'clock in the morning he awoke, located himself after a momentary wonderment and shook his head. No headache! That was strange! Apparently he was not going to suffer the traditional aftermath. . . . He went to take a cold bath, and returning found one of his companions of the night before in the hall. "How do you feel?" He felt fine. He had some breakfast at the nearest restaurant, and went to work.

X. The Detached Attitude

I

HIS kindly neighbors, who lived in the big room at the back next to his own, were Roger Sully and Don Carew, so he learned from the inscription on their mail-box in the entrance. He went in that evening after dinner to thank them.

He was surprised to find, in this dingy building, so charming a room—strikingly in contrast to his own bare and cheerless one. Across one wall a blazing splash of colour—some kind of foreign-looking dyed-stuff—and a few brilliant cushions on the couch, warmed the place and made him forget what seemed the bleak chill of all the rest of the world.

Roger, it appeared, was the fat little man with the air of distinction, who was making coffee in a glass bulb over an alcohol lamp. Don, a long and bony youth, was stretched at ease in a big chair.

"Have some coffee with us," said Roger. "It will be good coffee, I promise you. And good coffee," he went on in his gently modulated voice, "is one of the few really important things in life."

"And a cigarette," said Don, rising to offer him a box of queer-looking Russian things with long pasteboard mouth-pieces. As he offered the cigarettes with one hand, he raised the other and ran his long fingers through his fair touseled hair, reducing it to a state of more picturesque disorder. He made this gesture continually, not in mere nervousness but as if he were caressing something he liked.

The coffee was very good, and Felix drank it gratefully. The two hosts drank it as though it were a rite, Felix observed, a veritable and solemn ceremonial. They smoked

cigarettes the same way—slowly, as if tasting each inhalation with a devout palate. And aside from these rather solemn sensory enthusiasms, they maintained a slightly bored air.

They referred to the incident of the night before as if it had happened a thousand years ago. It did not appear to interest them in the least, and Felix found it difficult to identify them with the delightedly chattering companions who had escorted him home—until something that was said seemed to break the spell, and Roger leaned forward eagerly and demanded:

"Yes—now *why* did you call him McFish? Have you any idea?"

"Yes—why?" echoed Don, also alert.

Felix did not know, and could not imagine why anybody should care to probe the secret of a mere drunken mistake in nomenclature. . . . The McFish incident reminded them of some equally esoteric mistake made upon some similar occasion, and they spent an hour in a quite excited discussion of psychic revelations which seemed to Felix both immaterial and irrelevant. He went away feeling as though he had stepped by inadvertence into a chapter by Henry James, and he decided not to come again.

But he did drop in a few evenings later, in sheer boredom, and drank their coffee, and found that upon occasion they could tell a really amusing story—or was it rather that he had begun to understand the point of view from which they found things amusing?

One phrase in their talk, solemnly uttered, caught his fancy. He had seen it in books, but as used by them it seemed to have a special significance.

"The detached attitude?" he repeated inquiringly.

They smiled a little pitingly at him, and explained. The detached attitude was the proper state of mind for an artist. It was an attitude toward life which painters had learned, but which writers generally had forgotten and must re-learn if they were ever to make writing a true art again. The Greeks had the detached attitude. Flaubert had it. . . . And obviously Don and Roger also had it.

Felix suspected that it might be simply another name for boredom, but he did not venture to say so.

The artist, they went on—one taking up the argument languidly where the other left off—should strictly avoid personal experience. He should hold himself austerely aloof from participation in human affairs. . . .

"But I thought," said Felix, "that what the artist was supposed to need was experience!"

"A vulgar error," said Roger scornfully.

"What an artist needs," said Don, "is *background.*"

And *background,* Felix gathered from their further explanations, was something one got by being in many different places without ever settling down and belonging to any one place—by merely being there and, as Roger put it, "looking on disinterestedly while other people passionately and ridiculously did things."

The idea rather appealed to Felix. . . . He secretly wished he had stood by and looked on while the others got drunk that night. He regretted his participation in that scene—regretted it in spite of the absence of any of the traditional unpleasant after-effects. He wished he had remained austerely aloof from the human activities of that occasion. What, after all, was the use of passionately hitting somebody in the face if you couldn't remember afterward what it was all about? . . . He was inclined to think that Roger and Don were right; it was not the meaningless raw material of experience that one needed, but some calm, fixed point of view from which to look on and understand it.

Did they have such a point of view? He began to respect and envy them.

2

It was strange—he said to himself—that he should continue to be so upset by Rose-Ann's absence! He realized grudgingly and unwillingly how much the centre of his Chicago she had been. Without her companionship, his life seemed to have lost its significance.

His class at Community House had come to seem a nui-

sance, his newspaper work mere empty trickery. And there was nothing in the outside world to turn to, no cause that seemed worth serving. Socialism—it was too Utopian. Social reform—perhaps that was not Utopian enough. The art of writing—no, he must not think of that. . . . He found in his life nothing to give it meaning.

Rose-Ann's letters increased his sense of futility. They were friendly letters, telling of her mother's illness, which it seemed was sufficiently real this time, and of her encounters with a family of aggressively brotherly brothers; and to these letters he had responded in equally friendly terms.

That was the trouble. He did not want to write friendly letters. . . . He wanted to write angry letters. He wanted to tell her to stop writing to him—to let him alone, and let him forget her, as she would soon forget him. He wanted to say: "You know, and I know, that your moment of freedom, and all it promised, is over for good now. Springfield has got you, you belong to your family again, you will never come back except as the wife of some fat Springfield manufacturer, to see the sights, or go to the theater with him and show off your new gowns, and—yes, you will come to Community House, and visit your old class, and as you go away you will say to your husband, 'I used to know such a quaint and interesting boy here—I wonder what has become of him!' And your fat husband will put his fat cigar into the other corner of his fat mouth, and say, 'Yes, I suppose it's a good thing your folks got you back to Springfield when they did!' But he will be wrong, at that; Springfield is your natural habitat, you would have gone back there anyway. . . ."

He wanted to write absurd things like that to her. Instead, he wrote friendly letters, "frank" and comradely and cool, in the tone in which their whole relationship had been couched from the first, up to that insane moment on the station platform. . . .

He was ashamed of himself for thinking so much about her. Of course he was not in love with her! He was merely lonely.

Clive was still preoccupied with that troublesome girl to whom he had darkly and allusively referred in their infrequent luncheons together.

He needed other friends. He called on Roger and Don one Sunday afternoon, and they were primping to go out to a tea, and urged him to come along. "It's at Doris's—you know Doris, don't you? Doris Pelman. You'll like her."

Doris Pelman's apartment, somewhere on the north side, was like Don's and Roger's in having a certain impressive charm which consisted precisely in its being un-homelike. It was meant, somehow, to be looked at, rather than lived in. The chairs were thin-legged and rickety, but doubtless genuine antiques; the rugs were hung on the walls instead of on the floor; and on the walls, too, were dim Chinese paintings to whose beauty Felix was dense; yet altogether the place had an effect of being somewhere quite out of the world, and Felix liked it for that.

He was introduced at once to half-a-dozen young men and women, and in the course of the afternoon to half-a-dozen more. The young men greeted Don and Roger with a languid enthusiasm, and the young women with a sort of boisterous camaraderie. Felix was struck by something at once delicate and artificial about these young men, something which he had at first noted and then became oblivious to in Roger and Don. Among them, he felt somehow coarse and brutal. . . . He had an impulse to swear, or spit on the floor.

Don and Roger and two other young men were talking about travel. A nostalgia for foreign parts seemed to afflict them all. They had, it seemed, been everywhere in Europe; and most of them knew, with an especial and fond intimacy, the geography of France, Italy, and Spain. They had all been somewhere, if not East of Suez, at least somewhere exotically remote, last year; and they were going somewhere even more strange and distant, next year. With Don and Roger the question was, Tunis or Tahiti?—they could not decide which.

Felix had accepted this travel-mania as part of Don's and

Roger's interesting scheme of life. Sometimes he had even envied them, for they boasted that they did all this travelling "on their wits"; they insisted that one could go anywhere and live well, without money—and Felix had felt rather ashamed of his own singular lack of nomadic enterprise. But today he felt annoyed with them. He remarked to himself that though he had not ostensibly travelled, he had actually spent his life in changing his place of habitation, from house to house and from town to town; and even if these places were only the same middle-western town all over again each time, yet he felt that he had never stayed long enough to get really acquainted with it! He observed aloud, challengingly, that he thought one might stay in a city like Chicago the whole of one's life without quite exhausting its interest.

The four young men raised their eyebrows, and uttered impressively the names of the great capitals of Europe; and even more unctuously the names of little out-of-the-way foreign towns of which he had never heard.

"The trouble with writers," Don remarked—he and Roger paid Felix the compliment of regarding him as a fellow-writer—"is that they try to write before they have sufficient background."

Evidently, Felix reflected, Don and Roger had not made that mistake! They had been acquiring background for years, according to their own testimony—Roger for some ten years, and Don for perhaps five. And neither of them had, so far as he could discover, written anything yet! . . . And when would they begin, with so much background still left to be acquired? Tunis and Tahiti!

He turned impatiently to the young women. . . . They seemed at first much more congenial spirits. And yet there was something odd about them, too—something odd in their very friendliness. His hostess, Doris Pelman, a strikingly handsome girl, tall and fair, was the one with whom he had what most nearly resembled a conversation—a thing difficult enough to achieve at a tea. What immediately impressed him was that she did not seem at all conscious of her looks—she might, from her behaviour, not have been possessed of

any; or rather, the mysterious barrier across which two strangers, man and woman, must communicate, seemed not to be there for her; she was apparently unaware of herself and him, in a way that even old Mrs. Perk, a grandmother, never could be. There was in her manner an utter absence of shyness, an apparent perfect ease in this contact of personalities. But in her easy unembarrassed friendliness there was something steely and aloof—a fundamental untouchableness. She talked fluently, about his work and hers—she was an interior decorator, it appeared,—about the new books and plays, and, with an especial zest, about people. . . . A peculiar zest, too: she had a way, which at first gave him an uncanny feeling, of talking about human beings as though they were insects. The only things of which she spoke with visible affection were the fabrics and materials of her profession—and art in general.

But they were all, he felt, rather like this. The tea had become a kind of family gathering, in which only Felix felt out of place. Dusk fell, tall candles were lighted, and everyone became anecdotal. It would seem that they had spent their lives in collecting these anecdotes, and they related them and heard them with an inexhaustible relish—each one being rehearsed at full length with a loving care for the minutest psychological details. Some of these stories were apparently precious gems in their collection, worthy of being taken out and enjoyed over and over again. Other stories they laughed over uproariously, chokingly, helplessly—though to Felix the point of these seemed frequently rather obscure, and seldom very funny.

He went away feeling surprised, and not knowing quite whether he was disappointed or grateful at the absence of any challenge in these new feminine acquaintanceships. He had never consciously realized, except now in its absence, that undercurrent of vague questioning, at once delightful and disconcerting, as to just what there might be in a new "friendship"—what rich and beautiful possibilities it might hold in store: all the familiar and foolish day-dreaming that follows the most casual meeting of masculine with femi-

nine youth. But here there was no question whatever; imagination took no hold on this extraordinarily self-possessed, this imperturbable young womanhood. . . . Here was, indeed, the "detached attitude"!

XI. An Adventure in Philosophy

1

HE had not confided to Rose-Ann the fact of his change of residence—though he had asked her to address him in care of the Chronicle. But after some hesitation, he did write to her an account of some of the new impressions of Chicago which that change of residence had yielded. He did so with the feeling, which he could not logically defend, that these things concerned her equally with himself. He told her of Don and Roger, of Doris Pelman, and the detached attitude. "Adventures in philosophy," he called them; and he added:

"These people find life ugly, I think, and so they avoid and evade it. That is what I seem to myself to be doing at present, too. But I am not like them—I cannot just look on and be amused. Only I want to live my life understandingly—and I seem to have lost my bearings."

A boyish letter, he thought, having sent it; and he was glad enough that her reply made no mention of its contents—being, in fact, only a brief, hurried uncommunicative note of acknowledgement. But its briefness did not hurt him; by the time it came she was an utter stranger to him again. He glanced at her note, threw it in the waste-basket, and went on writing some meaningless story for the Chronicle. . . . After all, he had one thing left—a certain pride in his work: though it was all of no consequence, he knew whether it was good or bad—nothing could take that away from him. . . .

2

And then at another of Doris Pelman's teas he began another "adventure in philosophy."

He had been invited to come again. It appeared that these

teas were an institution. He came, out of curiosity, and left early; and as he went out into the hall he was joined by a young man who had come late, and who had sat in the corner silently and with an expression of weary gloom. He was a short, thick-set young man with curly black hair and heavy lips. He had interested Felix as possibly—he thought certainly—the only person there besides himself who did not feel at home in that group.

Outside the apartment door, he turned to Felix with an expression of extreme distaste.

"La-de-da!" he said with a glance backward in the direction of the company they had just quitted. Felix smiled sympathetically.

"You know, those aesthetic birds," the young man went on, as they descended the stairs, "—they make me sick." They emerged upon the sidewalk. "Come on," said the young man, "I know where there's a real party going on tonight, with some real girls. We'll get some grub, and then we'll take it in. D'you ever eat at George's? It's a Greek place on Clark street, just north of the loop. Not bad at all.—I know you," he added. "You work on the Chronicle. You don't know me, but you ought to—I'm a pretty good scout. My name's Budge—Victor Budge. I'm studying at Rush."

"At what?" Felix interjected.

"Rush—Rush Medical College. Going to be one of the best little surgeons that ever cut out a gizzard." He gave a dramatic flourish of his hand, as if wielding a scalpel. "But that's not all. I write, too. In me you behold the world's greatest novelist, living, dead, or unborn. Well may you be amazed—though I must say that you take the news rather calmly. I'll tell you about it. I have a theory about art—just like those birds in there; only I've got the correct dope. The trouble with art is that it's too detached from life. My idea is that the artist—the writer—has got to belong to the world he lives in—has got to be a part *of* it. That's why I'm going to be a surgeon. With a simple twist of my accomplished wrist, and a four years' course in human guts, I shall be able to make an honest living, and write on the side. Like

Chekhov. I never read anything he wrote, but I understand he's *some* writer. Yes, believe me, I shall put it all over these literary fakers!—You know Roger Sully?"

"Yes—and Don. The others I've merely met."

"Well, they're always gassing about where they've been—London, Paris, and places you never heard of. They've made a business of bumming all over the world. And they call that learning to write!"

"Acquiring background," assented Felix.

"That's the word. And avoiding anything that resembles real work. They have an elaborate code of morals about not working. It's a point of honor with them not to work in an office, not to have any job that requires regular hours, and not to stick at anything longer than a month or so. A job, says Roger, is fatal to the spirit of art! Can you beat that?"

"But how do they get along?" asked Felix. He had wondered, for in his visits to the Sully-Carew apartment there had never been any mention of the manner of their subsistence.

"Oh, odd jobs on trade papers, publicity stuff—anything. Or nothing. Mostly nothing right now, I guess. People can live quite a while on coffee and cigarettes, and an occasional invitation to dinner. And when they're short of cash, they can warm themselves with memories of the equator, I suppose."

They reached the little basement restaurant, and entered, "I'll order for you, if you don't know the grub," said Victor Budge. "This is on me anyway. One lamb kapama, one shish kebab, lots of olives, some red ink, two baklavas, and Turkish coffee. . . . Yes, the ripe olives, of course."

The olives were put before them. "Those remind me of Roger," said Victor Budge. "We were having dinner here one night, and he lifted one olive up, like this, delicately—poor devil, I'll bet he hadn't had a square meal for a week—and said, 'When I shut my eyes and taste one of these salty olives, I am back on the Mediterranean, in a boat with a lateen sail!' What do you know about that!"

Felix found himself rather sympathizing with Roger, and

resenting the vulgarity of outlook of this young man, which like his vulgarity of speech, seemed deliberate and forced. . . .

The food came, and Victor Budge served it. "I'm a realist," he said. "When I'm hungry, I know it. I don't pretend that I like olives because they remind me of the Mediterranean: grub is grub—you need it, and you've got to have it. And if you take life simply and realistically, it's not hard to get all you want of it. What's the use of starving in a garret? You and I know what life is like, and that it's a pretty good old game if you play it like everybody else does. Be like other folks! Why should an artist feel that he has to be so damn refined and superior? What's good enough for ordinary people is good enough for me. I don't believe in this artistic belly-aching-around about how coarse and vulgar life is. Take things as you find 'em, and don't bawl for the moon. That's what I say."

In spite of the way Victor Budge put this philosophy—its boisterousness somehow smacked of an inner lack of conviction, as though he were arguing to convince himself—yet there seemed to be sound sense in it. That, after all, was what Felix himself was trying to do—be like other people. . . . Yes, Victor Budge was right.

"Have some more red ink? Plenty more in George's cellar.—And girls, for instance. Now I don't have any use at all for this—this eternal poetizing about them! What's a girl, after all? The same kind of critter we are! I don't find 'em mysterious—and I don't go 'round grouching about 'em, either. Girls and me have always got along perfectly well. Because I don't expect them to be something else than what they are—Helen of Troy and the Blessed Damozel and all that sort of rot. I don't go up to them asking, 'Are you my long-lost ideal?' They don't want to be anybody's long-lost ideal. They want to be taken for what they are! Isn't it so?"

"I don't know," said Felix, humbly. . . . Yes, doubtless there was something unrealistic in his attitude toward girls—

something that he must get over. . . . "I'm afraid I don't know very much about girls. You may be right."

"Of course I'm right," affirmed Victor Budge. "It stands to reason that there isn't just one girl in all the world for you or me." Which, while perhaps not a logical sequitur to Victor Budge's previous remarks, was precisely what Felix had been trying to convince himself of. . . .

"That," said Victor Budge, "that sort of silly nonsense in people's heads is what makes them go around making themselves miserable, because they haven't yet found the one and only. I guess if a man was cast away on a desert island with a girl, he'd find she was his one and only quick enough! Of course, if you're going to have to spend the rest of your life with her, you'll want somebody who knows what you're talking about, and all that sort of thing! But when all you want is an evening's good time, what difference does it make to you whether she's read the latest book by Henry James? There are some damn fine girls that couldn't tell Henry James from Jesse James, and you darn well know it!"

Yes, Felix thought, books are not the only things worth knowing; there is life itself. And he had certainly never intended to spend his days in Chicago without seeing anything of girls. To be sure, he did not want to fall in love —and he knew himself to be at this period in a dangerously susceptible mood. But must he be such a fool as to fall in love with the first girl he kissed? It was time for him to learn to be like other people—to take such things more lightly. If he could find the kind of solace which Victor's words suggested . . . and a part of his mind leaped to welcome the thought of that release from the torment of loneliness. He envisaged in fantasy a "real" girl, ready to put aside the hypocritic disguises of civilization and reveal herself as what she was—a splendid young animal whose touch was joy. . . . As this warm vision flashed and faded in his mind, he turned to Victor Budge and asked:

"Where is this party you're taking me to tonight?" For the idea of these Arabian Nights come true in Chicago,

seemed a little surprising. But doubtless there were many things that he did not know.

"Did I say party? Well, you know what I mean," said Victor Budge, not without embarrassment. "It'll be a real party, all right, before we get through! We'll start down in Jake's place, and take in the whole district."

Felix flushed slowly, a painful flush of anger and shame that seemed to spread all through his body. Anger and shame at his own credulity. Arabian Nights, indeed! He laughed, loudly—at himself.

A picture came into his mind, compounded of things he had read, and the brief glimpses of actuality with which his curiosity had been satisfied and sickened back in Port Royal on the Mississippi—of the tawdry, dirty, dull, the incredibly dull, the joyless, loveless, hard, empty life of—as it was sometimes called—joy. . . . The stupid women, the foolish men, the mechanical noise and laughter, the boozy humour, the touch of stale, jaded, weary flesh. . . . And this was what Victor Budge was talking about—this was the subject upon which he had expended so much vulgar eloquence! . . . This, then, was Victor Budge's realism. This was what he called a real party; and those were what he called "real girls". . . . That was what he meant by taking things as one found them, and not bawling for the moon.

Victor Budge was staring at him. "What's eating you?" he asked.

Felix laughed again. "Well," he said, "I've some aesthetic theories of my own which make it impossible for me to accept your invitation. What's good enough for other people isn't good enough for me. I don't want to take life simply and realistically. I'm going off to starve in my garret and write poems to Helen of Troy and the Blessed Damozel!"

XII. Bachelor's Hall

I

HE had decided to write—what, he did not know yet: and it did not matter: something, anything, a play, a poem, a story—whatever came into his head, good or bad. It would occupy his time.

He spent a happy evening buying the materials of writing at a stationery store. He bought a dozen penholders, a quantity of his favourite stub pens, two bottles of a thick black indelible ink, half a ream of good thin bond paper, a great blotting-pad and a whole stack of small blotters. That afternoon he had bought a copy of Roget's "Thesaurus," without which the literary life is mere vexation; and a good, fat, reliable little dictionary with "derivations." Going to his room, he lighted the gas, arranged these materials on his little table, gazed at them with pleasure—and realized that he had forgotten to buy an eyeshade. He went back to the stationery store, and returned with a half-dozen eyeshades of the best pattern, the kind that do not saw the ears or get tangled in the hair. It appeared to him also that the gas-light really would not do; he must get a kerosene student's lamp; it would be a nuisance to keep it filled and trimmed, and the chimney clean—but the literary life has its inevitable penalties. . . . He would get a student's lamp and a gallon can of kerosene tomorrow.

He sat down again at the little table, fitted a stub pen into his penholder, lighted a match, and held the steel point in the blaze, to burn off the oil and take out the temper, making it soft and flexible and easy to write with. He uncorked the ink, wiped out the neck of the bottle with a blotter, and dipped his pen in. Yes, the pen held a full

sentence's-worth of ink, as it should. There was nothing the matter with the pen. He took a sheaf of paper from the great pile on the back of the desk, laid it at the proper angle, adjusted his chair, dipped the pen again, poised it above the virgin paper—and remembered that he had only two cigarettes left in the box. One cannot do a good night's writing without plenty of cigarettes. He went down to the cigar store and returned with five boxes.

Once more he dipped his pen, lifted it . . .

An hour later he roused himself from the vague waking dream in which his mind had been immersed. The sheet of paper was covered with lines and circles, stars, geometrical figures, childish pictures of houses with smoke coming out of the chimneys, illegible words, his own initials, and crude attempts to draw the outline of a girl's arm; and amidst all this, carefully obliterated, so that he could hardly recognize it himself, the name—*Rose-Ann, Rose-Ann, Rose-Ann.* . . .

He tore the sheet into tiny fragments, brushed them to the floor, and then got down on his hands and knees and carefully picked them up. He must remember to buy a waste-basket for his room tomorrow. He looked at his watch. It was twelve o'clock. He would go in and see Roger and Don; if they were staying up late, they might offer him some coffee.

Roger was lying on the couch reading Flaubert's "La Tentation de la Saint Antoine," and Don was sitting in an easy chair reading Flaubert's "Bouvard et Pecuchet." They looked up, bade him come in, and went on calmly with their reading. Felix took down a book from the shelf —one of the later works of Henry James—and yawned over it. . . . Perhaps he had better go to bed after all.

At that moment there was a stumbling up the stairs, and a loud banging at the door.

"That's Eddie Silver," said Roger, in a resigned tone

Felix jumped up and opened the door, and Eddie Silver entered, shouting, "Hello!"—at the same time playfully thrusting against Felix's stomach an automatic revolver made of tin. But Felix did not know that it was a toy.

He stepped back hastily, with a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"The fool's got a revolver!" said Roger.

"Here, give me that," said Don, going over and trying to snatch it.

"Let him alone—he's drunk," said Roger.

"No—not drunk!" protested Eddie Silver. "Don't say I'm drunk!" He tearfully extended his hands in pleading, with the revolver dangling from a finger. "But—" and he beamed at them suddenly—"going to *get* drunk! Going—" He noticed the revolver, put it carefully in one overcoat pocket, and took out of the other a quart bottle. "Get some glasses, Rojjie!" And taking off his overcoat, with the revolver still in its pocket, he bundled it up and tossed it over into the corner of the room.

There was a moment in which everybody—except Eddie—held himself tense in expectation of a bullet. Then Don started across the room toward the overcoat.

"No, Don—no!—You le' tha' o'co' 'lone. 'S my bes' o'co'!" And then, very clearly enunciated, "Hurry up with those glasses!"

Felix followed Roger over behind the screen which masked their simple culinary arrangements. "We've got to get him drunk enough to get that gun away from him," whispered Roger.

It took another bottle of whiskey, procured by Don and paid for by Felix, and four hours of time, to kill Eddie Silver's jealous watchfulness of that overcoat in the corner. Eddie, with a maudlin efficiency, divided his attention between the overcoat and the whiskey. His conversation for the last three of the four hours consisted of a promise to tell them something. "Wo'n' tell 'nybo' 'n worl' 'cep' you," he kept saying.

It appeared to have to do with himself and some girl—but whether it was in the nature of a crime or a joke they could not tell, because sometimes he laughed and again he cried about it. But as often as he started to tell what it was, he became diverted, and told instead about somebody else and

somebody else's girl. He confessed many follies that night, but not his own.

At three o'clock, just when he seemed to be really on the point of making that long-delayed confession, he suddenly commenced to laugh. "'Minds me Cli' Bangs!" he said. "Know Cli' Bangs?" And becoming articulate again he went on, "I'll tell you a funny story about him. He's got a—(come on, everybody have another little drink!)—house out in the country. I te' you 'bou' tha' h-house!"

And with vague relapses into the muffled speech of drunkenness, and startling recoveries of clearness, but always with a thread of coherence, he told the story of Clive Bangs' house. At times Roger, watchfully listening, had to serve as official interpreter; Roger understood the locutions of drunken speech as if they were a foreign language in which he was versed. And Felix, half-ashamed to listen, but curious, heard it to the end.

It seemed that Clive had built—or rebuilt—that house in Woods Point for a girl he was in love with at the time, years ago, five or six or seven years ago. But, said Eddie Silver, he had neglected to tell the girl that he was in love with her. And so, about the time the house was finished, she married somebody else. Or at least, became engaged to some one else, whom she eventually did marry. The point of this story—to Eddie it was an exquisitely funny story—was that Clive Bangs had kept the house a secret from her, because he wanted it to be a surprise. And it was this secrecy of his which had convinced her that he had another sweetheart; so that, in pique, she became engaged to the other man.

"Cli's li'l' secret!" said Eddie Silver, infinitely amused. "Do' pay to have se-secrets. Tha's why I go' tell my li'l' secret."

But again he wandered from the point, much to Don's and Roger's disappointment.

This painful story about his friend stirred Felix deeply He felt that it was true—true in essence, however fabricated in detail; it seemed to him indecent to have this stolen

glimpse into the secret of Clive Bangs' heart—and yet he was glad he had heard the story. Yes, it must be true. Rose-Ann had put it in a phrase: "Some girl has hurt him." And this—this ridiculous and pathetic incident, too ridiculous ever to confess, a secret that must be buried deep and forgotten—was the reason for Clive's being what he was. . . . And suddenly Felix understood why that story had moved him so:—for had he not been as ridiculously, as pathetically hurt, in his own episode of moon-calf-love back in Port Royal? And was that incident, too, to affect his whole life, remaining untold, unconfessed, poisoning his courage and his faith?

He jumped up, went to his room, altogether wide awake, and commenced to write—the story of his folly in Port Royal. He commenced it as a letter to Rose-Ann. He did not consider whether he would ever dare to send it to her. He only knew that it must be written so.

An hour later he paused, tired out—and remembered Eddie Silver's revolver. After all, that was perhaps a life-and-death matter, and this wasn't. He went back to Don's and Roger's room. . . . Eddie Silver's confession was again on the point of becoming definite.

"Tell you all about it," said Eddie. "Lis'n!"

They leaned forward to hear, but Eddie's head dropped on his arms, and he was asleep.

"Damn!" whispered Roger.

Felix slipped quietly over to the woolly heap in the corner and reached into one pocket and then the other. He found something strangely light to the touch. He pulled it out and gazed at it angrily. A tin revolver!

"F'lix!"

Eddie suddenly awake, was calling to him.

"Go ge' 'no'er bo'l' Swinburne!"

Felix looked at his watch. If he went to sleep now, he would never wake up in the morning in time to go to the office. He might as well keep awake the rest of the night. "Make some coffee," he said to Roger, "and I'll get some more whiskey for this crazy loon."

2

That sort of thing—he reflected next evening, when he turned in immediately after dinner—was not the sort of thing he had expected of his Canal street home. He had thought of it as being a quiet backwater, out of reach of the tides of life. And if Eddie Silver was going to come there! . . . He fell asleep, only to be awakened by the cry, "F'lix! Oh you F'lix!" and a pounding on his door. "G' up! We're having li'l' Swinburne party!"

Felix lighted a match. It was one o'clock. How had that madman got into the house at this hour? Anyway, there was no sleeping now. Besides, he had had six hours' sleep.

He rose and dressed, and went into the other room. "Make me a little coffee, Roger," he pleaded. . . . And an hour later he managed to slip away, and went back to his room and wrote feverishly on his letter—the letter which he would never send—to Rose-Ann . . . falling asleep with his head on the table, and only waking in time to get to the office, without breakfast.

The third evening Eddie Silver came again, and this time Felix felt himself too tired to write, and drank whiskey with the rest. In the morning he was apparently none the worse, except that he had no appetite for anything except a cup of coffee and a cigarette. In the afternoon, for lack of sufficient sleep, he needed more coffee. And of course, the more coffee one drank, the less one seemed to need real food, so that dinner, too, consisted exclusively of coffee. And then he could not sleep, and sat up half the night writing. Fortunately, Eddie Silver did not come again for a while, so there was a lull in the fever of existence. But it took days to get back to normal habits of eating and sleeping again.

And Felix, in the meantime, had commenced, for the sake of companionship and good coffee, to take his dinners with Don and Roger in their room, taking his turn in providing them. These meals were of a delicatessen sort, sometimes chosen because the ingredients reminded Don and Roger of

Spain or Italy, and sometimes because they made an interesting colour scheme.

For a while their evenings were quiet. Felix would labour upon that endless letter to Rose-Ann—who had by now come to seem to him an unreal figure, an invention of his own fancy; only becoming real again for a moment, a moment only, when he saw on his desk at the office an envelope addressed to him in her large undisciplined handwriting. Within that envelope would be a friendly note, saying nothing; and he would reply in kind.

One day he dropped in at the little Community Theatre to see how things were getting on; Rose-Ann in her latest note had expressed some curiosity about her old class and its new teacher. He found old Mrs. Perk there.

"It's pretty bad," Mrs. Perk whispered. "They don't like the new one at all. And they miss you, too." Which somehow pleased him very much, even though he suspected it to be only an old woman's flattery.

"And how do you like your new place? You don't look very well fed. No, it's no use; men can't keep house by themselves. You'll have to wait till Miss Rosy comes back, and be taken care of right!"

"I'm afraid Miss Rosy will never come back," said Felix.

"Don't you bother yourself about that!—Here, thread this needle for me, with your young eyes. . . . Why, I asked her for a piece of the wedding cake, the very day she went away so sudden. She'll be back all right!"

So old Mrs. Perk had been joking with Rose-Ann, too—about him. Felix wondered how she had taken it. . . .

"No, your bachelor hall won't last much longer, I can promise you that."

He laughed and went away, amused at the quaint pseudo-wisdom of the old. She thought she knew all about him and Rose-Ann. Two young things hopelessly in love, but too shy to tell each other so! And in this situation the inconveniences of bachelor's hall would operate as a *deus ex machina,* driving him in despair and her in pity into each other's arms—and matrimony!

How simple it all seemed to her! And how complex it all was in reality!

Mrs. Perk had the old-fashioned-woman's naïve confidence in the importance of woman's cooking; for that matter, how did she know that Rose-Ann could cook? Most probably she couldn't! Girls like Rose-Ann didn't nowadays. . . . And besides, how could Mrs. Perk be expected to understand the pleasures of a man living alone, free, able to keep what hours he chose—the sheer lazy charm of a masculine establishment, however inefficient!

Yes, Felix really enjoyed this happy-go-lucky kind of existence. As long as there was plenty of good coffee, and cigarettes, nothing else mattered very much—not even Eddie Silver.

He had commenced to come again. At first his visits were welcome as a relief from the monotony of Canal street life. But he was becoming a nuisance. . . . He would come in at all hours, but preferably when they had just gone to bed—pounding on the doors until they awoke and let him in. If the hall-door downstairs chanced to be locked, he would stand in the street and call to them, and throw pebbles—or dollars—against their front windows. . . . They would be drifting peacefully into dreams when something would wrench violently and painfully at their attention—they would try to ignore it and go on dreaming, but it would come again, determined, familiar, insistent—and they would reluctantly awake enough to become conscious of a voice in the street calling out their names. "Don! Roger! F'li-i-ix!"

"It's that damned Eddie Silver!" they would groan, and finally somebody, with a brain aching for sleep, would stumble down the stairs and let him in.

"Wake up there, F'lix—I brought you nice li'l' bo'l' Swinburne!" he would call, rattling Felix's doorknob, until he rose and joined in the festivities.

So strong is the power of association that Felix came to loathe the poetry of Swinburne—it had the smell of whiskey on it. . . .

It was increasingly hard to keep awake in the afternoons, however much he drugged himself with coffee. Getting up in the morning became a tragedy—his whole being cried out

for the sleep he could not have. Sometimes during the day, in the midst of a story, his mind would suddenly go blank for a minute. His appetite failed, and there were pains in his stomach that nothing but whiskey would relieve. He caught a bad cold, and had a cough that would not go away. And then, one morning in the eighth week of his stay in the Canal street menage, he found himself too ill to go to the office.

3

Roger and Don ministered to him with hot coffee, and called in a doctor who lived in the same building. The doctor had long white locks that fell picturesquely about the collar of his coat. He stuck a thermometer in Felix's mouth, took out his watch and held Felix's wrist, then shook his head gravely.

"What do you want to do with him?" he asked.

"We can't very well take care of him here," said Don.

"Any folks in town?" asked the doctor.

"No."

"H'm. How about the County Hospital? They'll look after him all right."

"I suppose that is the correct thing to do with a sick person," said Roger.

"H'm. Yes. . . . Has to be pretty serious, though, to get him in."

"Well," asked Roger, "how serious is it?"

"H'm. Can't tell just yet. May be very serious—may not be. Better not take any chances. . . . Well, what do you want to do? County Hospital?"

Roger and Don looked at each other. Felix tried to get the thermometer out of his mouth so as to protest, but commenced to cough instead.

"Yes," said Roger, "County Hospital."

"All right," said the doctor cheerfully, pulling his thermometer out of Felix's mouth and putting it in his pocket without looking at it, "I'll diagnose pneumonia. Where's the telephone? I'll call up the hospital right away, and stay here till they come."

So Felix was taken to the County Hospital—first addressing to Rose-Ann a large envelope in which he put his long, unfinished letter, and giving it to Don to mail. . . . And at the hospital, after the doctor got round to him, the night nurse told him that there didn't seem to be anything the matter with him except a bad cold, but the doctor thought he ought to stay in bed a week and rest up.

"He says you need to make up about a month's sleep, and get some of that booze out of your system." She grinned at him sympathetically, "You ain't used to it, are you?"

He rather wished, since he wasn't going to die after all, that he hadn't sent Rose-Ann that foolish letter. Still—he didn't care. He couldn't care very much about anything. He was weak, and tired, and very sleepy.

XIII. In Hospital

1

THE ward in which Felix lay was a great room with a hundred beds in it, only a few feet apart.

It was a restful place, after Canal street. Even the delirium of a man on the other side of the room was, after the first night, easy to disregard. Those yells had no relation to Felix's life; at least, they were not Eddie Silver's yells. He did not have to wake up and join in any painful festivities with that man. . . . In their utter aloofness from his own life, those yells seemed actually soothing, and he went to sleep to their music as to a lullaby.

2

Every morning, at five o'clock, he was awakened, and a cup was put to his lips. It was merely hot tea with milk and sugar in it; but Felix had never tasted any drink so good as this—so invigorating, so life-giving, so nourishing. . . . A wonderful drink! And when he had drained the last drop, he sank back again into a drowsy slumber like that of childhood.

It was so good to know that he did not have to get down to the office at eight o'clock. He could just stay in bed all day, and sleep, and sleep, and sleep.

His friends came . . . bringing him messages from still other friends. He never had any idea that he had so many friends in Chicago. He was touched by their remembering him, and caring about him. People from the settlement, and the boys from the office. Clive came the first day, bringing word that Mr. Devoe, the managing editor, was anxious about him. His pay, Clive assured him, would go on just the same while he was sick. . . . It seemed quite wonder-

ful. Felix had never realized how good people were. . . .

His friends brought books for him to read. Clive brought him "The Island of Doctor Moreau," which he had long ago promised to lend him. Paul came with a slender volume entitled "The Complete Works of Max Beerbohm." Roger brought him "The Confessions of a Young Man," and Don appeared with Dowson's poems. Eddie Silver did not come, though Felix rather expected him to bring a volume of Swinburne. . . .

Very nice of them, too, to think up such exotic and sophisticated books for him to read—a tribute, doubtless, to his superior tastes. But he felt, as he glanced languidly into their pages, that these were not just the kind of books a sick person wants to read. He wished somebody would bring him the Saturday Evening Post—or the Bab Ballads.

3

But it was all right—he didn't want very much to read, anyway. It was pleasanter to lie and day-dream—or watch the pretty head-nurse, who was exactly like a pretty nurse on the cover of a magazine—or think. He had a lot of time to think, now. Hours. Funny, how one never seemed to get time to think, outside of a hospital.

His thoughts were slow and long, reaching to places where it seemed he had not been in thought for a great while. Really, a hospital was a fine place. People ought to go there once a year for a long, long week of thinking. These thoughts of his own, for instance—how glad he was about them! They would make a great difference in his life, once he got out of the hospital. . . .

The only trouble was that when he did get out of the hospital, he never could remember what any of those thoughts were. . . . They had vanished, leaving apparently no trace upon his mind. And that seemed queer, too. Thoughts that took such hours upon hours to think, and that seemed so wonderful at the time, oughtn't to disappear like that. . . .

The only thought that remained was a very small and insignificant thought, not worthy of being remembered. It

was not really a thought at all, but only a memory: it went back to the time when he was a little boy in Maple, and there was a syringa bush in front of the house, growing up to the second-story window; and he would lean out of the window to see the bird's nest in the syringa bush, and smell the perfume of the syringa blossoms; and he would watch the mother-bird, sitting on her speckled eggs and looking back at him with bright, sharp eyes, not at all afraid of him. . . . Out of all those profound thoughts, that was all he could ever remember.

4

On Saturday morning, his fifth day at the hospital, Clive came, bringing Felix his pay-envelope from the Chronicle.

"When do you get out?" he asked.

"Some time today," said Felix. "The doctor has to formally discharge me, or something. This afternoon, I guess."

"Well, come out to my place in Woods Point, and rest up for a week before you go back to the office. . . . I'll have something special for dinner tonight in your honour. I have a neighbour woman come in, you know, to cook for me whenever I dine at home; you needn't be afraid you'll have to depend on my culinary abilities. All right? Good! . . . I must get to the office now and finish some work. Oh, I forgot, here's a letter for you. Good-bye—see you this afternoon!"

The letter was from Rose-Ann.

"I couldn't write," it opened abruptly, *"till today. Mother died Sunday. There is something very strange about death—you can't quite believe it, or adjust yourself to it. I've had all sorts of queer feelings about it all. But I know now why people go through the ceremonial of funerals—it always seemed to me absurd before. But in some queer pagan way it seems to make up for all one's ingratitude to the dead—for all the things you've forgotten, and only remember when it's too late. It is, as people say, 'all you can do.' And in some queer way, it suffices. It enables you to think of other things again—to go back to ordinary life.*

"I shan't have to ever quarrel with my brothers again now—that's one of the other things I think of. I mean—I've a tiny legacy, enough at any rate to make me independent of them forever. Father was very nice to me—I don't think I've ever told you about my father; he's a clergyman, and I suppose perhaps I didn't want to be known as a clergyman's daughter. But he does understand me.

"Felix, I am worried about you. I suppose it's absurd, but I keep thinking you're in trouble of some kind. And your letters tell me nothing at all—except—But we will talk about that when I see you.

"I'm coming back to Chicago as soon as ever I can."

Book Three

Woods Point

XIV. Heart and Hand

I

ROSE-ANN came to the hospital that afternoon—when he first saw her, she was walking down the aisle with the young hospital doctor, and he was pointing casually in Felix's direction. She nodded, said something to the doctor, and ran quickly over to Felix's bed-side.

"Are you really all right, Felix?" she asked, sitting down on the bed and taking both his hands.

He spoke without premeditation: "Oh, Rose-Ann, I'm so glad you've come!"

"Why?" she asked breathlessly.

"Because I love you," he said. It was an immense relief to have said it.

"Do you?" she said. "I'm so glad." They looked at each other a moment, and then she bent and kissed him softly.

They were presently aware of the smiling doctor standing beside the bed. Rose-Ann turned to him.

"I want to take him away," she said.

"You're welcome to him," said the doctor. "He's perfectly well."

"Can he leave—right away?"

"This moment, if you like."

"Good. I'll go and call a taxi. Be ready as soon as you can, Felix."

"But where are we going," Felix asked. He did not want to go back to the settlement, which he felt that he had in a way deserted; and he had an idea that Rose-Ann would not let him go back to Canal street.

"I don't know. I forgot—" said Rose-Ann, sitting down on the bed again with a helpless air. Then she burst out

laughing. "I was going to take you home—I was under the impression for the moment that we were married!"

"We can *get* married," said Felix, uncomfortably, feeling that an important matter was being disposed of rather cursorily.

She laughed again. "We can, yes. And I'm afraid that is what is going to happen to us; aren't you, Felix?"

The doctor smiled and left them.

"I know," she said. "It's an unfair advantage to take of an invalid. But what else can we do?"

"I only want to be sure—" said Felix.

"Of what?"

"You read my letter, didn't you—that terribly long letter, about that girl back in Iowa. . . ."

"Yes, dear."

"Well, you can see from that—I mean, I'm afraid you will think I'm not the sort of person who—"

"Who what, Felix?"

"Who makes a good husband. But, Rose-Ann—"

"Oh, I know that, Felix dear. And—I don't want a good husband. I want you."

"But—" He wanted to tell her that that was all over now—that he would try to be all that she wished. . . .

"I understand," Rose-Ann was saying. "You told me in that letter that there was something in you that rebelled against reality. Irresponsible—unstable—you used those words. 'Too unstable for ordinary domestic happiness,' I think you said. Well . . . who wants ordinary domestic happiness?"

"But," Felix said earnestly, raising himself up on one elbow, "a girl wants—more than an interesting lover. She wants . . . some certainties in her life. A home, children, and the promise of security for them. I—"

He wanted to be brave—to offer those certainties. But it was too rash, too bold a promise. How did he know he could fulfil it?

"I'd have to become very different, wouldn't I?" he said hesitantly.

Rose-Ann spoke very quietly. "I don't want you to be different, Felix. I'm not that girl back in Iowa. I'm—me. I don't want to be supported—I don't need to be; I told you I've a tiny but sufficient income of my own now. And I don't want the kind of home you speak of, Felix—I want to go on living my own life outside the home. And —I think, Felix . . . that perhaps there are enough children in the world without—without vagabonds and dreamers like us taking on such—interesting but unnecessary—responsibilities. . . . I really don't want us to be married at all, Felix; but I'm not brave enough to dispense with the —rigmarole. I want you to have your freedom, and I mine. I don't ask any promises of you—any at all. I know what we are like. Freedom—for each other and ourselves—that's what we want, Felix. Isn't it?"

2

He pressed her hand, and remained silent. He had not dreamed of this. . . .

"Isn't that what we want, Felix?" she asked softly.

"I guess so," he replied dully, looking away from her. . . . He knew he ought to be grateful to her; but he was sad rather, with the wish that he had had the courage to promise rash, mad, impossibly beautiful things.

Instead, he was to give her—uncertainty, insecurity. . . .

Did she understand?

"Do you remember," he asked, staring outward as if into the darkness, "what Garibaldi offered his soldiers? *'Danger and wounds'*"—

He paused. "That seems a queer sort of offer for a man to make to the girl he loves," he said grimly. "But, Rose-Ann—"

"I enlist," she said softly.

They pressed each other's hand, looking away from each other, silently each in a separate world of dream. Then she smiled, coming back a little bewildered to the world of immediate fact. "I must call that taxi," she said.

XV. Pre-Nuptial

I

THE streets outside were full of dirty melting snow, and there was a cold drizzly rain falling.

"We still don't know where we are going," said Rose-Ann, as they stood in the doorway, waiting for the taxi. "Isn't it amusing? What are we going to tell the driver?"

"City Hall, what else?" said Felix.

Rose-Ann shrugged her shoulders. "It's an abode, a place of residence—a home, if you like—some place to take you besides Community House or that dreadful place that I've heard about on Canal Street: it's that I'm thinking of, rather than the legal process. It's rather absurd, isn't it, that neither of us has anything resembling a home! We just *are* vagabonds, that's a fact. . . . And—somehow I don't want to be married at the City Hall and have a fat alderman offer to 'kiss the bride.' . . . If you don't mind, I want some place to go where we can have a moment to consider what to do. After all, even vagabonds have their self-respect to take care of! Let's not be rushed into an ugly and stupid performance that has no significance or beauty for either of us. I want to have something to say about the way I get married! And if there isn't some way of getting married that's *our* way, so that we don't have to feel like fools and cowards, why—" she finished in a mournful voice, "I think I'd rather not be married at all."

Felix patted her arm reassuringly. "That's all right," he said. "I know what we'll do. We'll go to Clive's place."

"Clive Bangs? Up at Woods Point?"

"Yes." And he told her of Clive's invitation. "You needn't worry, it's not a bachelor's den, it's a real house,

with all the appurtenances thereto appertaining, and a woman to come in to do the cooking. And we'll be married there. Clive will help us arrange it."

The taxi had swung up beside the curb. Rose-Ann still hesitated a moment, then said, "All right!" and climbed in.

"Northwestern station!" said Felix to the driver.

"No!" said Rose-Ann. "To Community House first!—If I'm to be married, Felix, at least I must change my clothes; there's no need for me to be married in this"—and she looked down at the grey suit she was wearing. "I'm just as I came from the train."

"All right," said Felix. "But let's not stop there long. And—I do hope they won't suspect what we are up to . . . it will be rather a give-away, our dashing in together and out again!"

She laughed. "You mean it will look like an elopement? Well, you can wait for me in the taxi."

He waited, impatiently, smoking a cigarette, for what seemed a long time. At last she came, dressed now in some soft creamy thing under her grey cloak, and carrying a suitcase.

"I think one person suspected me," she said.

"Mrs. Perk?"

"Yes. Old women think they know so much, don't they? Why should she imagine—? just because I—! It's my own fault, for making a last sentimental visit to the theatre. But I wanted to—sort of—say good-bye!"

At the station, Rose-Ann hesitated again, and urged Felix at least to call Clive up and tell him they were coming. Felix refused. "Let's make it a surprise," he said.

"I don't know!" Rose-Ann said, when they were aboard the train. "To tell the truth, I'm a little afraid of your friend Clive."

"Afraid of him?"

"I mean—I'm in awe of him, a little."

"Nothing awe-ful about Clive. He's a nice fellow. I've always wanted you to meet him."

"I wondered why you kept us so carefully apart," said

Rose-Ann. "I thought perhaps you felt that I didn't measure up to his specifications. Do you think I will?"

He laughed tenderly, and looked at her. She was very sweet, and, it seemed, very tired despite the buoyant vivacity that always made her lovely. "You are wonderful," he said. "But," and he put his arm about her, to the amusement of two adolescent girls across the aisle, "it doesn't make any difference what anybody in the world thinks about you, except me!"

"How possessive you are, of a sudden!" said Rose-Ann. But she relaxed deep within his caressing and protecting gesture, and closed her eyes.

He looked down, touching softly with his glance the delicate surface of her cheek as it slanted away from the high cheek-bones, and the forehead half hidden under the drooping tangle of red gold hair. Yes, she was very tired, and strangely enough he was glad to have her so, glad to feel her restless and vivid life relax to peace in the shelter of his arm. She had gone through a good deal of late; he thought of her home, and of that death-bed from which she had come, and the jarring family hostilities only half-repressed by the solemnity of that scene; it was strange to think of her—this lovely child made for happiness—emerging from those troubled shadows. . . .

She was free now. And he too was free—free from dubieties and hesitations, strange and foolish suspicions of her—free from fear. How simple everything was, after all! By what strange ways they had come, to find each other—not knowing until this last moment the real meaning of their lives. . . .

2

"It's beginning to snow again," said Rose-Ann, rousing herself and looking out of the window. And then—"What have you told Clive Bangs about me?"

"Not very much," he confessed. "I suppose because of Clive's manner about his own girls—or girl, I should say; it's been a particular one for a long time now. He alludes

to her, discusses her in an impersonal way, but he has never even told me her name. A queer sort of futile secrecy.—Which reminds me of a curious story about him." And he told her Eddie Silver's drunken tale of the building of the house.

"This house we are going to?"

"Yes—if the story's true."

"So that's why he became a woman-hater."

"Perhaps not quite so bad as that. I should say it made him a Utopian."

"It's the same thing," said Rose-Ann. "It's curious," she added, "how many men nowadays—particularly interesting men—are afraid of women; afraid that being really in love will ruin their career, commercialize their art, or something.—Are you afraid of me, Felix?"

"Not any more," he laughed.

"Why, were you ever?"

"Afraid you didn't really care for me," he said.

"Yes, you *were* rather shy! But I liked you for it. And it was just as well, until I had made up my own mind."

"How did you come to make up your mind? Why did you decide to marry me?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, tell me."

"It was partly your love-letters—"

"Did I write love-letters to you? I suppose I did—but I tried awfully hard not to!"

"Beautiful love-letters! And then—being at home: that more than anything else made me realize that I was in love with you. I had thought so before, but then I was sure of it. And—well, it seemed stupid not to make something of our two lives. Why should we keep on being afraid to try? . . ."

"Were you afraid, too, Rose-Ann?"

"Yes. But I'm not any more. We're going to be very happy, and you're going to be a very great man and write wonderful things. . . ."

He stirred uneasily. "Don't put our happiness on that

basis, please. Suppose I don't write wonderful things!"

"But you will!"

He sighed. "That makes me realize that I am a little afraid of you, Rose-Ann. Afraid you will make me have a career!"

"Don't you want a career? I don't want you to do anything you don't want to."

"That's just it. I'm afraid you are going to make me do all the things I do want to! Things I would otherwise just dream of doing!"

"Is that prospect so terrifying?"

"Yes, rather."

"Poor dear!" She pressed his hand in hers. "I suppose I *am* a terrible person. I can't do the things I want to do myself; and so I'm going to insist on your doing them —is that it?"

"I have the feeling that you expect a terrible lot from me," he said.

"It's true—I do think you're rather a wonderful person."

"I wish you wouldn't!"

"I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help it, Felix. You'll have to take me, enthusiasm and all, my dear! For I'm in love with you, and I *do* think you are going to be a great man, and I shall continue to, no matter how miserable it makes you feel—so there! I won't marry a commonplace man, and you'll have to agree to let me think you out of the ordinary, or the marriage is off!" She tilted her chin defiantly.

"All right, Rose-Ann," he said. "You may think me as wonderful as you like, if only you'll not say so out loud. Praise upsets me. I thrive only on contumelious blame! So if you want to put me at my ease, tell me something bad about myself."

"That's easy enough," she said. "You're quite the shabbiest-looking man that ever went to his own wedding, vagabond or not. You seem to have packed off to the hospital in your oldest shirt—look at those cuffs!" Felix looked at them, and pulled down his coat-sleeves

over their frayed edges. He looked at his dusty shoes, and tucked them out of sight under the seat.

"Does Felix feel himself again?" she asked maliciously.

"Quite," he said. "Now I know it's true I'm going to be married."

XVI. Clive's Assistance

I

THE snow had fallen more and more heavily while they were on the train, and the air was crisp when they emerged into the dusk at Woods Point. "I think I'm going to like my wedding," said Rose-Ann.

They found a car at the nearest garage to take them to Clive's place, some two miles away. The driver halted at the edge of a steep ravine that cut down toward the lake. He pointed over to the gleam of a lighted window. "There it is," he said. "And here's the path. It goes right along the edge of the ravine, but Mr. Bangs keeps it pretty clean of snow, and there's a railing by the worst places. I guess you can make it all right. Everybody seems to." He backed the car about, and left them.

Recent footprints, not yet quite obliterated, defined the path for them. They went up toward the house, laughing. Rose-Ann had urged him again at the station to call Clive up and tell him they were coming, and again he had refused. Now, as they edged the ravine, holding on to the railings that guarded the most precarious moments of the path, they were feeling a little foolish and very happy about their adventure. It was thus, they read plainly in each other's eyes, that they should be married.

A little out of breath at the end of the path, they faced a suddenly opened door, and Clive standing there, laughing and puzzled as he tried to make them out. "Felix?" he said. "And who else?"

"And Rose-Ann!" cried Felix. "We've come to Woods Point to be married!"

"No!" cried Clive, astonished, unconsciously blocking the doorway.

"Yes!" said Felix gaily.

Clive laughed. "Welcome!" he said, ushering them inside. "If I'd known you were coming, I'd have met you at the station and guided you to the house. You weren't afraid of breaking your neck?" And then, as Rose-Ann emerged from her snowy cloak, he took her hand. "So this is Rose-Ann! I'm delighted. You know, Felix isn't very good at descriptions, and I never got the right idea of you at all."

Felix felt vaguely annoyed. All this was beside the point.

"I suppose we *can* get married here, can't we?" he asked.

Clive looked at him, and then back at Rose-Ann. "How solemn you both are!" he said. "Why, I really believe —Felix, what is this about getting married?"

"That's what we've come for," said Felix patiently.

"You mean—" Clive appeared incredulous.

"I mean, married. Preacher! License! Ceremony! Didn't you ever hear of anybody getting married before?"

"Not really?"

"Yes, really. And right away. Tonight. Is your mind capable of taking all that in, or must I spell it out for you. You seem dazed."

This was not exactly the reception he had expected for his news.

"I'm more than dazed. I'm shocked," said Clive. He turned again to Rose-Ann. "Tell me—when did this—when did you children decide on this rash deed?"

"This afternoon," said Rose-Ann. "It is rash, isn't it? Do you really think we shouldn't?"

Felix made an impatient movement. What difference did it make what Clive Bangs thought?

"Come in by the fire," said Clive. "You—you bewilder me, you two."

He put a hand, with some kind of vague paternal gesture, on Rose-Ann's shoulder. "In here"—and he showed them into a room where a coal fire glowed in an open Franklin stove. He arranged three big chairs. "Sit there. . . . Bad weather outdoors."

"No," said Rose-Ann, "it's beautiful! It's snowing. . . ."

"I'll get you something warm to drink," and Clive left them.

They sat there a moment, silent.

"Do you—do you think—?" Rose-Ann began in a troubled voice.

"I think Clive is a little upset," he said. "Poor devil!"

"You don't—?" She stopped again.

"What?" he asked dreamily, reaching out and finding her fingers as they drooped over the arm of the chair.

"Nothing," she said.

Presently he looked up, and met her eyes. A look he had never seen before glowed in them, and it was as if she had shown him some secret part of herself always hidden before. That look seemed to reveal to him, as if for the first time, dazzlingly, by the real truth of their love. It was as if everything they had said to each other had been in some way false and evasive. This was the truth—this ultimate surrender, this faith-beyond-reason, this something deeper than pride and joy in her eyes. He was strangely exalted. He thought: "This—*this*—is marriage. . . ."

In an instant the revelation had passed. Rose-Ann bent down swiftly to shake out a fold in her skirt—and to hide that revealing look, it seemed. Clive was at the door, coming in with their hot drinks.

"And now," said Clive, settling down comfortably in the third big chair, "tell me about it."

2

Rose-Ann looked at Felix.

"We're going to be married, that's all," said Felix.

"Yes," said Clive reflectively, "people do."

"You think we oughtn't to?" asked Rose-Ann.

Clive rubbed his chin. "I really think it is my duty to make one last, however futile, attempt to dissuade you!"

"Why?" asked Felix.

"Because," said Clive smiling, "you are so obviously in love with each other now—so obviously happy, just as you are."

"And you think marriage will spoil that?" Rose-Ann asked.

Clive regarded them. "Well," he said, "how many people do you know whose marital happiness you would be willing to take as your own?"

They were silent, Felix annoyed.

"I don't know anybody whose happiness *I* would want," said Rose-Ann at last. "But—"

"But you hope to have something different, and very much better," said Clive gently, as if speaking to a child.

"I suppose it's foolish," said Rose-Ann.

"I don't see anything foolish about it," said Felix defiantly. "What's your objection to marriage?"

Clive turned upon him with mild surprise. "Is this the young man with whom I have had a number of luncheon discussions—in which, if I remember rightly, you spoke eloquently on this same subject?"

Rose-Ann turned to Felix inquiringly. "I don't think you've ever told me your views of marriage, Felix," she said.

Clive laughed. "That is what is known in fiction as a sardonic laugh," he observed. "I trust you recognized it. I will repeat it for you: *Ha, ha!* Now, Mr. Fay, is your opportunity to explain to your prospective bride your views of marriage."

Felix flushed. "As a matter of fact, Rose-Ann and I have discussed them," he said.

" 'Relic of barbarism,' " quoted Clive with gentle malice.

"Of barbarism?" Rose-Ann repeated, puzzled.

"Clive and I have the habit of orating to each other on these subjects," said Felix, "at lunch and whenever we haven't anything better to do."

"I've heard of those luncheon discussions," said Rose-Ann, "and wished I could have been present. I'd like to hear you," she said, looking at Clive and then back to Felix. It was, subtly, her defiance to Clive.

"Our discussions," said Felix, "are devastatingly theoretical. We are accustomed to refer to everything we don't like

as a relic of barbarism. Marriage, for instance. . . . It's essentially an intrusion by the Elders of the Tribe into the private affairs of the young. The Old People always think they know what is best. Originally, of course, their power to rule the lives of the young was far greater. Rose-Ann and I wouldn't have been allowed to select a mate for ourselves. The choice would be made for us by the Elders; in their infinite wisdom they would choose for her a lord and master, and she would settle down at once to her proper womanly business of cooking his meals and bringing up his babies. Me they would doubtless have mated with some possessive young hussy who would efficiently smother and drug to sleep with her own physical charms any desire of mine for an impersonal intellectual life. And thus we would both have been made safe and harmless—Rose-Ann with her cooking and babies, and I with my harem of one. Both of us tied down body and soul, and thus presenting no menace to established institutions!"

He was speaking quickly, with a feeling that it was all very absurd, this speech-making at large upon a subject which interested them now only in its specific and unique aspects. "But times have changed," he went on. "This form of tribal control now exists only as a rudimentary survival—a custom to which one must superficially conform, and nothing more. So long as Rose-Ann and I *are* allowed to choose each other, and decide for ourselves how we are going to live, we can very well permit the Tribe to come in, in the person of its official representative, for ten minutes, and ratify our choice! . . . There, those are my views, expressed in the uncouth intellectual dialect which Clive and I affect in these discussions. That's just the way we talk."

"Very clever," said Clive. "You shift your ground easily. . . ."

"A wedding *is* an awfully tribal thing, isn't it?" said Rose-Ann soberly. "Especially," she added more cheerfully, "the old-fashioned kind. With the families and all. And the usher asking you which side you are on, the bride's or the groom's! I went to one when I was back in Springfield."

"I went to one," said Clive, "once upon a time, in Chicago. . . . I had a sense of the girl's having been recaptured by her family, after a temporary escape—recaptured and subdued. In her white veil, at her father's side, coming down the aisle, she was so unlike the free wild thing I had known.—Somehow it seemed like a funeral to me—a triumphant and solemn burial of her individuality. I remember that I went away from church saying over to myself that little poem of Victor Plarr's, that ironic little funeral poem—do you know it? It begins—

"Stand not uttering sedately
Trite, oblivious praise above her—
Rather say you saw her lately
Lightly kissing her last lover!"

They laughed, interrupting Clive as he began on the next stanza, and then they stopped, waiting for him to go on. They exchanged a swift glance, wondering if this was the girl of the story they had heard.

"I forget just how it goes," he said confusedly. "But it ends something like this—

"She is dead: it were a pity
To o'erpraise her, or to flout her.
She was wild and sweet and witty—
Let's not say dull things about her."

Having finished, he began to poke the fire.

"A lovely poem," said Rose-Ann softly.

"But," said Felix vigorously, "it doesn't discourage me a bit. I think Rose-Ann can be just as wild and sweet and witty after marriage as before. Her individuality, if that is what you're worrying about, is not in the least danger of being buried by marriage."

Clive turned to her. "You aren't afraid the Tribe will get you at last?" he asked. "That would be too bad."

She flushed, as at a compliment. "This marriage will be one final defiance and farewell to the particular tribe to which I belong," she said. "No, I—I guess I'm not afraid. What do you think, Felix?"

"Bring on the Tribal Ceremony!" said Felix.

"Well," said Clive, "I've done my duty. . . . And now I'll see about getting you married."

Felix sighed with relief, and reflected that it was about time Clive began to take the occasion seriously.

"I suppose," said Clive, "that it hasn't occurred to you that this is Saturday afternoon, and the county clerk's office is closed. And you can't be married without a license."

Felix looked his chagrin. Of course, he would have forgotten something essential! He glanced sheepishly at Rose-Ann, who seemed merely amused. But why must he be, always, and even in his getting married, a moon-calf?

"However," said Clive, suddenly transformed into the efficient and practical personage that Felix had so often admired, "I think it can be fixed up! I'll telephone my friend Judge Peabody. And—" he paused for a moment and frowned—"we'll need another witness. I'll fix that up, too."

"I'm sorry I forgot about the license," said Felix as Clive briskly left the room.

"It's all right," she said. "I forgot, too. It makes no difference."

Clive came back in a few minutes. "It's all right!" he said. "Judge Peabody says the city council is in session tonight at Waukegan, and the county clerk will be there. Judge Peabody will 'phone up there and tell the clerk you're coming. You'll go there at eight o'clock, right after dinner. I've arranged for a car to take you—it's only a few miles further on. Judge Peabody will be here at nine, and perform the ceremony. The other witness is on the way here, to join us at dinner. And Mrs. Cowan says the dinner will be ready on time. How is that for management?"

"You with your objections to marriage!" said Rose-Ann, laughing. "You're a fraud!"

"No," said Clive. "Merely a born compromiser!"

XVII. Charivari

I

IT appeared that Mrs. Cowan, the plump neighbour who was cooking Clive's dinner, had heard his telephonic arrangements for a wedding, and was, according to Clive, much flustered. A few minutes later she disappeared from the kitchen, with a brief warning to Clive to keep his eye on the oven, and presently returned, breathless and sparkling-eyed, wearing her Sunday shawl, and bearing one of her own cakes.

"We'll give them the best wedding we can, Mr. Bangs!" she said.

Clive came in to report this speech, and thus reminded that Mrs. Cowan was a human being, and a woman, with a prescriptive right to share in this occasion, he took the bridal pair to the kitchen and introduced them. Mrs. Cowan's warm friendliness pleased as well as embarrassed them. Rose-Ann exclaimed over the cake, and putting on an apron, commenced to help with the last stages of dinner.

Clive and Felix wandered back to the Franklin stove. "Oh, yes," said Clive. "I must build a fire in your room. Come along," and he set Felix to chopping kindling in the woodshed while he carried up a load of cannel coal. Felix followed him to the great room at the top of the stairs, occupying almost the whole of the upstairs space, with a fireplace at one end. "I built that fireplace myself when I had the house remodeled," said Clive. "It's quite an art, building a fireplace so that it will draw properly. I'm very proud of it."

Felix knelt and stuffed the kindling into the grate. "No," said Clive, "let me do it—you don't know how."

While they waited for the kindling to get well ablaze

before putting on the coal, Clive took Felix to a French window that opened on a balcony. "Here you have a view of the lake," he said, and then going to one end of the balcony, "these steps lead down to my shower-bath, which unfortunately only functions in summer. You must come out here then—you'll like it. It's really wonderful country. I love it even in the winter. I'll tell you: Why don't you and Rose-Ann stay out here this week? I've got to be in town next week anyway, and I'll clear out tonight when the fuss is all over and leave you to yourselves. Everything is shipshape, and Rose-Ann will have no difficulty in finding where things are—and I'll arrange with Mrs. Cowan to get your dinners. You haven't a place in town yet, have you?"

Felix thanked him, with the sense that the dedication of this house to another honeymoon than the one for which it was originally intended gave Clive a kind of painful and ironic pleasure. But there seemed to be no good reason for refusing the offer.

"Do you suppose my job will still be open for me when I come back married?" he asked.

"Not merely that, but you'll probably get a raise," said Clive. "That's the custom. They figure that a young man who has married and settled down will be a more faithful slave. Usually they're right. Only in this case, taking Rose-Ann into consideration, I would say that 'settling down' wasn't the correct term."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that Rose-Ann is much more likely to keep you *in* mischief than to keep you out of it. You know that."

"You've got a funny idea of Rose-Ann," said Felix.

"Oh, not at all. You know yourself she's not the ordinary girl by any means. And she won't make an ordinary wife—for which you can be thankful."

He put the coal on the fire, set up the fire-screen in front of the fireplace, and they went downstairs.

"You needn't eye me like the basilisk," said Clive, taking a cigarette, "I'm not saying anything against your beloved."

"All the same, I think you've got some kind of curious

and erroneous notion about her. She's not interested in these damned theories of ours. She's a real person," Felix protested.

"She's real, all right," said Clive. "But she's not a simple person. She's very complex. I think she's just as complicated—as mixed up—as you or I."

"Heaven forbid!" said Felix.

Rose-Ann came in just then, and Felix looked at her guiltily, ashamed of discussing her with his friend.

"Things are getting along very well," she said. "I just ran in for a moment to see my lover." She came up to him, with a shy frankness, to be kissed. "That ought to show Clive what sort of a person she is!" he thought.

She turned from his embrace to Clive. "It's curious," she said, "the pleasure people take in other people's weddings! There's Mrs. Cowan—she doesn't know me and Felix. She hasn't any reason to believe we are going to be happy. It's just because it's a wedding! I was thinking about it, and I realized that if this were a secret love-affair, she would be shut out of it. But a wedding lets her in. In a way, it's really more her wedding than it is ours!"

"Well," said Felix, "I don't mind! I haven't that damnable instinct of privacy that some people seem to regard as essential to love-affairs. I'd as soon the whole world knew we're in love."

"All right, Felix—but you haven't had to discuss the nuptial couch with her, and *I* have! She's upstairs now getting the room fixed up, and putting my clothes in the bureau; I left her to avoid an argument about which nightgown I should wear—as a matter of fact, she doesn't think any of them are equal to the occasion, they're all too plain! Perhaps you'd as soon everybody knew all about those details, which is what a wedding seems to amount to—but I don't like it!" And she made a face and left the room.

"Well?" said Clive, rather triumphantly.

"Well?" said Felix, stolidly. He really had not liked that last speech of Rose-Ann's. If she didn't want her nightgowns discussed in public, then why—?

"You're really rather conventional, at the bottom of your soul, aren't you?" Clive remarked thoughtfully.

"Of course I am. And so is everybody else. So are you, if you only knew it."

"Then," said Clive, coolly, "why do you marry Rose-Ann? She isn't. It you want a conventional wife and conventional married happiness, why don't you marry some simple little country girl, and have a houseful of babies? Why—"

There was a knock at the door.

"That's my other witness," said Clive, and hurried into the hall.

2

While Clive and the newcomer talked for a moment in the hall, Felix stood frowning at the fire. . . . Clive, he felt, was becoming rather exasperating. Really, the unquestioning enthusiasm of Mrs. Cowan was preferable to such an inappropriately critical attitude as Clive's. There was something deliberately malicious in it. That last remark about the "simple little country girl" was an attempt to shake his faith in this marriage. It was a damned mean trick! . . . And then he laughed at himself. For how could Clive possibly have guessed the effect of that remark? How could he know what a crazy fool he was talking to? "A simple country girl." How could Clive know that there lurked in the back of Felix's mind an absurd and impossible wish—a wish, long-forgotten, except in the most senseless of idle day-dreams, which these words of Clive's made him remember, with an inexplicable pang! A wish for precisely what he ought never to have—. Marriage with the girl of that foolish day-dream would be, for such a person as himself, the most fantastic of tragedies: and it was doubtless its very impossibility that had made him conceive it as a romantic ideal. And that houseful of babies—for they too were a part of that foolish day-dream of his—why, that was madness. In actuality, he would have fled from the prospect of such a marriage. He really wanted—what he had so miraculously found in Rose-

Ann: a companionship in the adventure and beauty of life. . . . And in an hour or two his choice would be confirmed—irrevocably. Marriage was just that—a definite decision among tangled and contradictory wishes. . . .

He turned to face the girl whom Clive had led into the room. For an instant he was startled as by an apparition. Perhaps it was the effect of Clive's words—this young woman seemed the very creature of his day-dreaming wish. Young, hardly more than nineteen, of slight but robust figure, with soft brown hair, dark quiet eyes and a serene mouth, she brought with her the fragrance of that fantasy which had only a moment ago disquieted him. She had a bundle in her arms, and for an instant the illusion was breathlessly complete—she was Rose-Ann's phantom rival come to him in visible sweet flesh, bearing his baby at her bosom.

"The bridegroom!" Clive was saying. "The witness!—Miss Phyllis Nelson, Mr. Felix Fay."

She smiled imperturbably and held out her hand, her eyes meeting his.

"And what have you in that bundle, Phyllis? Something without which no wedding would be complete, I suppose," said Clive.

"Only some smilax," she said. "And I know how many knives and forks you have, Clive, so I brought along some of my mother's silver. But where is—"

Rose-Ann ran in just then, and the two girls, while Clive pronounced their names, shook hands, and then suddenly kissed each other, and with arms linked went out into the kitchen.

Clive followed with the bundle, asking Phyllis if by any chance it contained a veil for the bride. He and Felix were shooed back into the other room, and Rose-Ann and Phyllis reset the table. The three women could be heard talking together, with a kind of excited seriousness, as they worked. Felix's last glimpse was of Phyllis arranging wreaths of smilax on the white tablecloth, and Rose-Ann, with an adorable gesture, lifting her arms to twine some of

it about the low-hanging chandelier, while Mrs. Cowan, her hands on her hips, stood looking from one to the other with approval before dashing back to the kitchen.

"Womenfolk have an instinct for such things," said Clive, sitting down beside the fire. "Even Rose-Ann appears domestic."

Felix looked at Clive fretfully. "I don't see anything terribly domestic about hanging up a wreath of flowers."

"You are hard to suit," Clive commented. "When I say she isn't domestic, you look daggers at me, and when I say she is, you still object. What shall I say? I strive to please."

"So it seems," said Felix.

Clive smiled. "Since you're so conventional, you ought not to complain. Nothing is more regular and old-fashioned than the effort to embarrass a bridegroom. You may interpret my remarks as a modern version of that ancient mode of licensed tribal merriment—an intellectualized kind of 'shivaree.' I am trying to make up for the absence of the traditional tin pans out by the front gate. After all, Felix, you are taking Rose-Ann away from all the rest of us, and you must expect to be made to suffer a little for your selfishness."

"Dinner!" Phyllis called in to them.

They went into the dining-room.

4

In the middle of the table was a glass bowl brimmed with sweet peas, and around it a wreath of smilax; a festoon of smilax hung from the chandelier. At the head of the table stood impressively a platter bearing a steaming roast duck.

Mrs. Cowan hovered proudly over this spectacle, preparing to take her departure.

"Oh, not without a piece of the wedding-cake!" cried Rose-Ann, and cut it for her.

Immensely gratified, and having wished the bride happiness, and at the last moment bestowed upon her a motherly kiss,

Mrs. Cowan went, bearing the piece of cake carefully wrapped in a napkin.

Clive stared after her. "Very interesting," he said, "she takes home a piece of her own cake—"

"No longer her own," Rose-Ann finished, "and no longer merely cake—but a piece of Wedding Cake! Will she put it under her pillow, I wonder, and dream of getting another husband? She's a widow, and her husband used to get drunk 'something awful.' Yes, she was telling me all about it—I think by way of warning, so I wouldn't be too badly disillusioned by the facts of marriage. 'You can't expect 'em to be angels,' she said. So you see, Felix, I'm prepared for anything!"

This speech jarred upon Felix. It was too much in the vein that Clive had been indulging all evening. He wondered if he were going to become critical of Rose-Ann, now that he had a sense of possession with regard to her. He said to himself that Rose-Ann was over-wrought and he himself over-sensitive.

"Rose-Ann, here at my right hand," Clive was saying, "Felix, here at my left. I believe that is correct. The Witness will take the remaining seat, opposite me. First of all, we must have a toast." He rose. "Up with you all! No, Rose-Ann, you sit still—you can't drink your own health. . . . Here's to the bride!"

They lifted their glasses.

"No—wait till I finish my speech. . . . In defiance of all the laws of nature and of modern realistic fiction, we wish her happiness! . . . No, that isn't all I have to say. . . . We make this wish—at least I do—with an unwonted confidence in its fulfilment. For this is no ordinary marriage, dedicated to the prosaic comforts of a mutual bondage—it is an attempt to realize the sharp new joys of freedom. A marriage, let us say, in name only—for upon Rose-Ann I set my faith, believing that not even a wedding can turn her into a wife!" Rose-Ann looked up at him and smiled. "To Rose-Ann," he concluded, "and her adventure!"

They drank. Felix looked at the others. He had a sense of something having been outraged by this speech —something which, if only a tradition, was somehow real to all of them except Clive. But Rose-Ann merely looked amused, and Phyllis's expression told him nothing. He reflected, "She's used to him by this time."

A sense of embarrassment remained with him, in spite of the light talk that followed as Clive heaped their plates in turn with roast duck and dressing.

"Why are you so quiet, Felix?" Clive asked at last. "You might at least tell us how it feels to be a bridegroom —whether you feel as depressed as you look."

"I confess I shall be glad when it's over," said Felix.

They laughed, and went on talking. Rose-Ann was apparently enjoying herself. She and Clive were exchanging pleasantries on the subject of "modern marriage." For some reason the phrase annoyed Felix. Did they know what nonsense they were talking? Or did they really think that his and Rose-Ann's marriage was to be, as it were, a sociological performance for the benefit of onlookers?

Presently Rose-Ann was humourously disclaiming "all the credit" for the modernity of the arrangement. Felix, she insisted, was equally entitled to it; he was just as modern as she was!

"Why," Felix suddenly asked in exasperation, "should we all want to be so damned modern?"

"Hark to the defiant bridegroom!" said Clive. "He wishes us to understand that *his* wife is going to love, honour, and obey him, in the good old-fashioned way. He won't stand for any of this new-fangled nonsense. The Cave-man emerges!"

Felix flushed. He had only succeeded in making a fool of himself, it seemed.

Rose-Ann spoke up. "I hope it *will* be modern," she said. "I'm sure it won't be like any of the marriages I've seen back in my home town. . . . Why are you so afraid of freedom and modernity, Felix?"

Perhaps it was that word *afraid,* which Rose-Ann used so lightly, that stung him. "Because," he said, "I am apparently the only one here who knows what those words mean."

He had not intended to say it—certainly he had not intended to say it in that tone of voice. It came out, raspingly, like a voice out of a music-box, a voice from a strange record that has been put in unawares. His voice was, even to his own ears, remote and metallic.

Rose-Ann looked at him, startled. "What words, Felix?" she asked gently.

"The words you have all been bandying about," he replied. "Modernity. Freedom." His voice was still hard.

"Well, what *do* they mean?"

She leaned toward him.

The others were silent, listening—Clive with an amused smile, Phyllis with troubled eyes.

"Not what you think, I'm afraid, Rose-Ann," Felix's voice answered, the voice with a quiet grimness in it.

Rose-Ann's voice took up the challenge softly. "And what do *you* think they mean, Felix?"

He looked away from her, and spoke as if from a distance, slowly. "Freedom. . . . It's not a nice word, not a pretty word . . . to me. There is something terrible in it . . . something to be afraid of. . . ." He looked back at her. "Don't offer me freedom, Rose-Ann."

Her voice was still soft, but infinitely cool and firm. "Why? Because you might take it? I knew that when I made the offer, Felix. I think I know what you mean. But I take back nothing." She lifted her chin proudly. "I am not afraid of freedom."

"Bravo!" cried Clive. "Rose-Ann, I am falling in love with you myself! Why don't you marry *me* instead of Felix! He doesn't appreciate you."

Curiously enough, nobody except Felix seemed to mind Clive's clowning. Both girls laughed, and the atmosphere was suddenly cleared.

"But what an odd occasion for us to choose to stage a quarrel!" said Rose-Ann, gaily.

"Yes," said Felix, now bewildered and contrite. "I must have got into my argumentative mood. I'm sorry. When I get to arguing I think of no one and nothing, except the point at issue—which is usually not of the slightest importance. It's a bad habit you must break me of when we are married."

"You are forgiven," said Phyllis.

"Don't forget there's fruit salad coming," said Rose-Ann, rising and bringing a bowl from the sideboard.

"Yes," said Clive, "and the car will be here for you two people in ten minutes or so. Will you have your coffee now, Felix?—Rose-Ann?"

XVIII. The Authority of the State of Illinois

I

THE car took them through the deepening snow on up to the county seat, where the license was soon made out for them. "You're lucky to find me here on hand tonight," said the county clerk. They expressed their appreciation. "But I like to accommodate young folks," he said smiling, and shook hands with them when they left.

It was snowing more heavily all the time, and the roads were difficult, but Judge Peabody had kept his promise, and was waiting for them when they arrived. He greeted them with grave benevolence.

"Mr. Bangs tells me you want a very simple ceremony," he said, and put on his spectacles and took out a little book, turning the pages back and forth until he found the right place.

"Do you, Felix Fay, take this woman, Rose-Ann Prentiss, to be your wedded wife, to cherish and protect, in sickness and in health, till death do you part?"

A promise: a strange defiance flung out by the human spirit against the infinite vicissitudes of chance; a barrier of will against all the hostile forces of the days and years; a renunciation of whatever may lie outside the magic circle of our little mutual happiness, forever; a few weak words, easily forgotten, that must be stronger than passion, stronger than forgetfulness. . . .

"I do," he said.

"Do you, Rose-Ann Prentiss. . . ."

"I do."

"Then, by the authority of the State of Illinois, in me vested, I pronounce you husband and wife."

He took off his spectacles and put them in his pocket.

2

Rose-Ann and Felix looked at each other in a kind of surprise. So they were married!

The judge was wishing them happiness. "And now," he said, "I'll hurry home before the snow gets any deeper."

Felix, a little embarrassed, and wishing he could do it less obtrusively, gave him a crumpled bill, which the judge, without embarrassment, smoothed out and placed in a wallet.

"Good-night!" he said, and let Phyllis help him on with his overcoat. "Good-night!"

At the door he turned. "Oh, by the way," he said. "Do you want a marriage certificate?"

The question was addressed to Rose-Ann. She shook her head in a determined negative.

"No?" he repeated absently. "Lots of people don't, nowadays. . . . Good-night!"

"I suppose you know the house is yours for as long as you want it now," said Clive to Rose-Ann.

"Yes," she said, "Felix just remembered to tell me a little while ago. It's terribly nice of you, Clive. I can't think of a lovelier place to be!"

"And that's the car honking outside," he said, "to take Phyllis home and me to the station. I shall just catch the ten-fifteen. Efficiency!" He gave her his hand. "I'll leave you two strictly alone here—but I'll expect to come and visit you in your real home as soon as you acquire one. May I? You'll probably be willing by that time to see other human beings again."

"Of course!" she said. "And you, too, Phyllis!"

"I'm sorry," said Phyllis. "I shan't be here. I'm just home for the week-end, and then I'm off to school again. I hope I *shall* see you again sometime. I'm sure you're going to be very happy. Good-bye." The girls kissed.

"Felix," said Clive, "doesn't like me any more. He thinks I almost spoiled his wedding. Good-bye, old man!"

"Well," said Rose-Ann, when the door shut them out,

"that's over!" She came to him and drooped within his arms. "I'm very tired. Felix, I never want to be married again!"

"Poor dear!" he said, "it is rather awful, isn't it?"

"Oh," she said, lifting her head from his breast, "there's one more thing to do, before we can be—just us. I promised to save a piece of my wedding cake for somebody." She smiled. "You can't guess who!"

"Yes, I can," he said. "Old Granny Perk!"

XIX. Together

I

AT dawn Felix awoke with a sense of loneliness. The vague consciousness which had remained with him even in sleep of a beautiful and beloved body at his side, was gone; and the hand that he reached out in troubled half-sleep had found no warm and reassuring presence. For an instant it seemed as though the night had been only a dream. He felt a vast desolation, a profound ear. It was as if not this one night only had been taken from him, but the thousand nights and days which lay implicit in it—the lifetime of sweetness and intimacy which it had begun.

Startled awake by the pain of this loneliness, he looked about him. Rose-Ann was not there. The bed was still warm where she had lain, the pillow kept the impression of her head, but she was gone. The white light of the dawn lighted the room, the fire was dying in the grate, a cool little wind swept in through an open window, and one of the leaves of the long French window that opened on the balcony stood ajar. Rose-Ann's clothing lay folded on a chair at the foot of the bed.

His reason told him that Rose-Ann had slipped out to the balcony to breathe the morning air. But he was still filled with the terror of that waking moment. Moved by an unreasoning fear, he leaped from the bed and ran to the French window. Outside the world was white. On the balcony, in the deep snow, were the imprints of her little naked feet. Still agitated, he followed those footprints where they led around the corner of the house. And then he stopped, and gazed.

She was there, standing unclothed and rosy in the morning

wind, in the light of the dawn, leaning over the railing of the porch.

"Rose-Ann!" he called sharply.

She turned. "Good-morning, old sleepy-head!" she cried. "You were dozing so peacefully that I didn't have the heart to wake you up. Isn't it lovely!" And she waved a hand toward the ice-bound lake that stretched out to the east like an Arctic wilderness, tinged with the rose of dawn.

"What are you doing out here?" he demanded, commencing to shiver.

"I was thinking of taking a snow-bath!" she said. "I've always wanted to and never have. Look where the snow has drifted up here against the house. Wouldn't it be wonderful just to drop off into that snow bank! Come, let's do it!" She took his hand and led him to the edge of the porch, which was here only a few feet above the ground, with the snow piled up to its very edge.

"But how would we get out of that snow-bank once we had got in!" he expostulated. It was a crazy idea, and he had no intention of letting her carry it out.

"Oh, don't let's stand here and argue about it," she said impatiently, "and get cold. I'm going to, anyway!" And before he could stop her she had climbed the railing and leaped down into the snow-bank. . . . He realized that he must do the same. There was no choice! And in an instant he had leaped down beside her, down crunching through soft feathery snow that stung the skin deliciously and made the blood hot in his veins—and an instant later, laughing, they were fighting their way out and stumbling up the steps to the balcony and into the house.

"Towels!" cried Rose-Ann, racing to the bathroom and back and flinging him one. "Now wasn't that worth doing!"

"And no doubt very entertaining to the neighbours," Felix grumbled—secretly rejoicing in their spectacular feat. It really seemed to him a splendidly pagan thing to have done.

"Our only neighbour for miles is Mrs. Cowan," said Rose-Ann, "and she's over somewhere the other way.

Besides, for once in my life I'm going to do the things I want to do without stopping to think of other people first. Now, Felix, can you build a fire? If you can't, I can!"

"Of course I can build a fire," said Felix. "The real question is, can you cook an egg? Because if you can't, I can." He was a little nettled at her having taken the lead in the snow-bath, and he did not intend to let her carry off any more honours of leadership. "If Clive has not deceived and betrayed us," he continued, "you ought to be able to find eggs and things in the kitchen."

"All right," she said obediently; and finished with the simple task of dressing, in an old skirt and a smock, but not without a look at herself in the glass, she started off to the kitchen.

Felix looked at the fire. It needed rebuilding, and he would have to chop some more kindling. He went down to the woodshed, and energetically chopped up one stick. Then he paused, laid down the hatchet, and commenced to whistle a plaintive, melancholy, tuneless tune. He picked up his hatchet, ran his thumb over the edge, and laid it down again.

He was not thinking about chopping kindling. He was thinking about Rose-Ann, there in the kitchen only a few feet away. What was she doing? He could see her in imagination, ransacking Clive's cupboards. He wished he could see her in reality. He started to his feet impulsively, and then sat down again.

He was annoyed with himself. Couldn't he be separated from her for a few minutes without wanting to tag after her? She would be surprised, and perhaps annoyed, by his coming in. She would ask, "Have you got the fire built? Well then, for heaven's sake, go and build it, and leave me alone to get you some breakfast!"

He could not confess to her how utterly indispensable her presence had become to him. . . . Yesterday they had been two different and separate persons—but they were so no longer. A quaint churchly phrase leaped into his mind, a phrase that had never seemed real before: "these twain

shall be made one flesh." He knew its truth now. Last night they had lain and talked for hours of the things they were going to do—together. Together! Their life henceforth had pictured itself to them as something enjoyed always in common. They had not thought, last night, of ever being apart again. But of course they would be apart—a great deal of the time. And doubtless it was as well to begin now. There was no sense whatever to this feeling of loneliness. He was going to have the rest of a lifetime with Rose-Ann, and he certainly ought to be able to go off and chop a little wood without her. No, he must *not* go to the kitchen to see what she was doing! He must subdue this weakness—this absurd feeling of helpless loneliness when he left her for a moment.

He raised his hatchet and brought it down sharply on the stick of wood. The door opened, and there stood Rose-Ann, with an apron on, her cheeks flushed.

"Hello!" he said, and laid down the hatchet.

"I just came to see what you were doing," she said.

"Chopping a little kindling, that's all," he said.

"Oh," she said. She continued to look at him with interest.

He took up the hatchet again, and split the stick with a few efficient strokes. She looked about, up-ended a short log, and sat down, her hands in her lap. Felix chopped another stick, and another, with a sense of great peace and contentment. Chopping kindling had become very interesting. He chopped on, under her gaze. He did not need to look up at her. She was there with him; that was sufficient. He went on chopping.

"Don't you think that's enough kindling now, Felix?" she asked at last, hesitantly.

He looked at the pile. He *had* chopped an awful lot! "I thought I might as well cut enough to last for a while," he explained.

"A good idea," she agreed. "And we might as well take a lot upstairs while we're about it. I'll take some, if you'll load me." She held out her arms, and he piled them full, then loaded his own, and they went up together.

She knelt beside him, watching, while he laid the fire. He felt somewhat insecure in his knowledge of fire-making, and he tried to remember just how Clive had done it the day before. But he felt nothing critical in Rose-Ann's watching; and apparently he remembered well, for the fire behaved quite as it should. He waited until the proper moment, put on the cannel coal, and drew the fire-screen in front of the fireplace.

Rose-Ann stood up. "Now we'll go and get breakfast," she said.

In the kitchen, she turned to him. "Do you like omelettes?" she asked.

"I love them," he said.

"With peas and things in? There's a can of little peas here." She searched in a drawer and found a can-opener.

"Here, let me," said Felix authoritatively, and took it from her.

She surrendered it, and bent to another drawer, bringing out another apron.

"Must wear," she said, and tied it around him.

The touch of her fingers was too much. He turned and took her in his arms, and found himself tightly bound in hers, and kissed the eager lips uplifted to his.

"Oh, Felix!" she cried in a weak, smothered voice. "Felix, lover!"

"And now," she said at last, smiling happily and rousing herself from their dream, "we really must get breakfast!"

2

After breakfast, which was prolonged for hours by talk and cigarettes and endless cups of coffee, they "bundled up" and took a long walk, through the deep snow, stumbling and laughing like children, and as indefatigable as children. First they went down to the lake, that snowy waste strewn with high-piled ice-hummocks, and with the blue of water showing strangely here and there. Then they turned their backs on it, and walked toward the west, where the black branches of trees made delicate patterns against the sky.

They were as if aware of the kinship of their love to the life of the earth, and seeking outdoors that magical sympathy of natural living things which no roof-tree, however hospitable, can furnish to lovers. This great white expanse, with no green thing visible anywhere, with not even the friendly touch of the ground underfoot, might have seemed to hold out no invitation to their love. It was an earth sunken in winter-sleep, apparently unconscious of their presence, vastly indifferent to their demand. And yet they loved it, and it gave them something which they craved.

Utterly exhausted, they reached home at last, with the sunset flaming behind the black branches. They were ravenously hungry. But they faced the prospect of clearing up after last night's feast, a task blithely postponed that morning, before they would have dishes enough to eat from. Of course, they might have had Mrs. Cowan come in; but they preferred their magic isolation. Changed into dry garments, they set to work washing dishes—not without a friendly quarrel over which one should wash and which one wipe them.

"Maybe you think a man doesn't know how to wash dishes," Felix said belligerently.

"No," said Rose-Ann, "but I think a woman might have the privilege of washing dishes in her own house. . . . Felix, I wish this were our own house! I shall hate to go back to town after this. . . . But don't let's think about that now. All right, selfish, you can wash the dishes!"

The thought frightened Felix a little. A house of their own! A house in the country! How beautiful, and yet how—but no, nothing seemed impossible now. . . . They could plan for it, and work for it, and at last have it, together. . . .

3

"Read me some poetry, Felix," said Rose-Ann, after dinner, as they lay drowsily, in a great warm nest of cushions, in front of the fire in the room upstairs.

He stirred himself, and then relaxed. Rose-Ann's head

was nestled in the hollow under his shoulder, and her red-gold hair, unbound, flowed across her bosom and touched his caressing hand. He was altogether too happily situated at this moment to want to go downstairs and look for a book of poems. Besides, why need he?

"And frosts are slain and flowers begotten."

he began. She closed her eyes, and from her quiet breathing one might have thought her asleep. But once when he faltered, forgetting the words, Rose-Ann murmured them softly:

"And frosts are slain and flowers begotten.

He took it up, in his voice of subdued chanting:

"And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins. . . ."

and so to the end.

"Say me some more," she breathed. "Like that. Anything with woods or flowers in it."

He began quoting, mischievously filling in words to make up the rhythm where he forgot the original:

"Iris all hues, roses and jessamine. . . .
In shadier bower. . . . (I forget! But here it was)
With flowers, garlands and sweet-smelling herbs
Espoused Eve decked first her nuptial bed. . . .
Yes Eve! In naked beauty more adorned,
More lovely than Pandora. (So Milton says!)

"I can't remember just how it goes, but there are some lovely things in that old Puritan's blood-and-thunder epic. . . .

"These, lulled by nightingales, embracing slept,
And on their naked limbs the flowery roof
Showered roses. (She's asleep!)"

Outside, unseen, the moon emerged from behind racing clouds, and lighted with its pale radiance the great stretch of winter-bound lake and desolate shore along which they had wandered that day seeking some response in its vast

indifference; and its rays touched and silvered the roof-tree of the little house on the edge of a ravine, within whose doors, by the grace of the English poets, it was April. Blossom by blossom, about their couch, the spring began, and upon their naked limbs showered roses.

"No," said Rose-Ann, "I'm not asleep!"

He laughed tenderly. "No, not now. But you have been for half an hour. I've been watching you sleep. You do it beautifully!"

"Have I really?" She stretched herself, like a kitten upon awaking from a nap. "Well, I'm awake now, and I want some more poetry. Something sad this time."

"More poetry? What a glutton you are!"

"But I *like* poetry, Felix. It's real to me—as real as our love."

"But why sad poetry?" he teased.

"I don't know. I suppose it's because I'm so happy."

"I know," said Felix, and out of the storehouse of his memory he brought one after another the stories of old unhappy love, impossible love, love that goes toward death. It was as if the contrast of these tragic fantasies was needed to make poignant the sweet and easy fulfilment of their own love—as if some chill breath from the grave must intervene between their caresses lest they seem too tame.

"The mountain ways one summer
Saw life and joy go past,
When we who were so lonely
Went hand in hand at last.

"And overhead the pine-woods
Their purple shadows cast,
When the tall twilight laid us
Hot mouth to mouth at last.

"O hills, beneath your slumber,
Or pines, beneath your blast,
Make room for your two children—
Cold cheek to cheek at last!"

"No," murmured Rose-Ann, lifting her head and putting her warm cheek against his own, a cheek wet with sudden tears. "Not cold cheek to cheek, Felix!"

Tears sprung from that sweet sadness which only happy youth dares indulge—the wilful and daring melancholy of young love, turning aside from its joys to think of death. . . .

Rose-Ann dried her eyes cheerfully. "I wanted to cry," she said, "and now that I have, I feel better. Give me a cigarette!"

XX. "The Nest-building Instinct"

I

BY mid-week, Rose-Ann had become transformed into a housewife. Meals were being planned, the butcher and the grocer were making regular deliveries, Mrs. Cowan had been pressed into service, and Rose-Ann was quite the mistress of the establishment.

And then suddenly she became discontented. "I can't keep on playing that this is my house," she said. "There are so many things I want to do to it! Let's go in to town and look for a place of our own."

So on Thursday morning they took the train to town. On the way in, they marked—or rather, Rose-Ann marked—a dozen advertisements of apartments to let, which she proposed to spend the morning looking at.

"I'm not going to find what I want," she said, "and I'm going to be cross, I know. I'd really rather not have you along. Why don't you do something else? Go and visit the office. We'll meet at lunch."

"All right," said Felix. Going to the office, as it were to confess his marriage, was an uncomfortable errand. In spite of what Clive had said, it seemed to him far less likely that he would get a raise than that he would be fired. But it did not seem to matter much now, if he did get fired. The Chronicle job no longer seemed the only one in Chicago.

"Where shall we meet, and when?" he asked.

He noted down the time and place. "But don't you want to come with me? Clive would like to see you."

"No, but you can bring Clive along to lunch, if he will come."

"Good-bye, then." It was their first parting since

Saturday, ages ago. It was to be for hours. In the station here, amid the crowds, they sought to be casual about it.

"Good-bye." She smiled, and turned away. He walked a few steps, and then turned. She had stopped, too, and was looking back at him mournfully.

He came back to her and took her in his arms. "How foolish we are!" she whispered, and surrendered herself to a kiss that seemed somehow, to both of them, to make their temporary separation endurable.

At the office, Felix perceived at once, by the manner of his welcome, that he had established himself more firmly in the esteem of everybody by getting married. He shook hands formally with every one, and received their congratulations. At last, it seemed to be over. But Willie Smith reminded him: "You haven't been in to see the Old Man, have you?"

Felix could not imagine that Mr. Devoe would concern himself with such a matter as a reporter's marriage. But Willie managed to convey to him Mr. Devoe would feel hurt if not permitted to add his felicitations. "Sure, the Old Man will want to see you!"

Felix shyly went in. Mr. Devoe rose and shook his hand warmly. "Yes, Mr. Bangs told us," he said. "Quite a surprise, my boy. But it's the right way to start out in life. Yes. . . . I understand you're quite well again? I'm glad it wasn't anything serious—you look quite well now—" and his eyes twinkled. "When you get back to work, come in and see me—we may have some new plans for you. Next Monday? Very good."

New plans. . . . Felix wondered what that phrase might mean. Perhaps the promise of a raise in wages—though it sounded like something more than that. But he could not guess what it might be, and he decided not to tell Rose-Ann about it—she was so egregiously confident for him, and she might build up vain hopes on a phrase that meant nothing. He did not want her to be disappointed.

2

Clive, who looked tired, and seemed preoccupied, came willingly enough along to lunch. "So the nest-building instinct is at work already!" observed Clive. And then: "What kind of place does Rose-Ann want? One with elevators, a man in brass buttons to answer the door, and a garbage incinerator?"

At lunch, which started in with a curious lack of amicability, Felix repeated this latter pleasantry to Rose-Ann. It occurred to him that what she wanted might very easily be something beyond his income, even with that possible raise.

Rose-Ann smiled at Clive. "Not exactly that," she said. "Perhaps more preposterous still! The truth is, I don't know, exactly. All I do know is that I don't like any of the things I've seen this morning. I did see some that—but no, even those won't do."

"What's the matter with them?" asked Felix.

"I'll take you along and let you see for yourself. Mostly stuffy little cubicles. You know what the ordinary Chicago flat is like."

"Why should you want something different?" asked Clive innocently.

"Why not?" said Rose-Ann, challengingly. "Felix and I are different—why should we live like everybody else?"

"I'm glad to hear it," said Clive. "I confess I thought you were going to."

"Is that why you have been so distant and satirical with me today? Had you lost confidence in me already?"

"Forgive me," he said.

"You are angry at some other girl," said Rose-Ann shrewdly.

Clive smiled. "Perhaps you are right."

"And if you gave me a hundred guesses," said Rose-Ann, "perhaps I could guess the girl, too."

"Perhaps you could," he conceded.

"So it's Phyllis. I'm sorry. I like her very much."

"So do I," said Clive grimly.

Felix was surprised at Rose-Ann's rashness in teasing Clive about a situation concerning which he had always shown a disposition to keep his own counsel; and still more surprised at the way Clive took this teasing.

"Well," Rose-Ann was saying, "she has an air of quiet possessiveness towards you which indicates that not much can be amiss!"

"What is amiss, dear lady," said Clive gravely, "is with the universe. Phyllis and I are each all right, in our separate ways, I hope. Phyllis is, I'm sure!—she's a lovely child, isn't she? . . . With an interesting history too. Perhaps I'll tell it to you, some time."

"Clive is very unhappy, isn't he?" said Rose-Ann, when he had left them for a moment to talk to a couple who had greeted him from another table.

"He prefers to be unhappy, I think," said Felix.

"Why should you be so unsympathetic, Felix? Because you are contented, you think everybody else ought to find it easy to achieve the same state? I hope you're not going to be smug. I'm really sorry for Clive."

"I might be sorry, if I knew what to be sorry about. I haven't the slightest idea what the trouble is."

"That neurotic girl, of course."

"Neurotic? Do you mean Phyllis? Why, what nonsense!" he exclaimed.

"Why nonsense?" she asked.

"Because—why—well, it's just ridiculous!"

"After all, Felix, we neither of us know her well enough to be so positive," said Rose-Ann pacifyingly.

"Then why do you say that about her?"

"Because I think it, Felix!" she replied with a touch of exasperation. "I really do!"

"I can't understand you," he said coldly.

"What are you children quarrelling about now?" asked Clive, returning.

Rose-Ann laughed. "About nothing at all, again. Felix, we are rather absurd. Come, we'll look at those apartments.

—And don't imagine vain things about our home till you see it, Clive!"

3

To Felix, the apartments seemed just apartments. An apartment couldn't be a house in the country. And as apartments, these were all that could be expected. The only serious objection to them, indeed, was that the rents were rather high.

"Why don't you like them?" he asked again.

"I don't know. They're not quite—our kind of place."

"I wish I knew what you meant, Rose-Ann," he said wistfully.

"I'll try to tell you," she said, "on the way home."

And on the train, she began: "You saw those people on the other side of the hall at that last place we looked at?" The door had been opened by a fat man with a bulging neck, and they had glimpsed an interior of plush and golden oak, and the rather plump and vapid-looking woman who awaited him there. "Well, those apartments are made for people like that—I mean people without imagination. They take such an apartment and buy some of the furniture that is made to go in it, and they settle down and are contented there. Why not! It has a kitchen, a dining-room, a bedroom, a bath-room, and a room to sit in and entertain callers. And that is the whole of their existence—cooking, eating, sleeping, washing their bodies, and showing off to their friends. But that isn't the whole of our existence. —Felix, I would rather we would eat at a lunch-wagon and sleep on a park bench, than make those things the centre of our lives!"

It was not so much her argument that impressed him as the genuine and profound scorn in her tone and manner. He was conscious of a defection of sympathy in himself from the point of view that her words expressed. It might have been himself of a few years ago saying these things so intensely; and yet they seemed like nonsense to him now!

But one could not argue about such things in the midst

of a trainload of people, the nearest of whom were already beginning to be too much interested in one's affairs, so he only said, "Yes—I think I understand."

But his mind went back to their life in the country—to the cooking of that first breakfast in the kitchen, to their first dinner after walking through miles of snow, to the bed of their happy love and sleep, the tingling snow-baths at dawn, and the fire in front of which they had sat and talked for so many lazy hours—and it seemed to him, without quite understanding why, that Rose-Ann was really denouncing her own life there with him! A kitchen, a table, a bed, a bath, a fire—hadn't these things circumscribed their life? "People like *that*," she had said, bitterly. Who were these people but their own happy selves of the past week? And why had she turned so fiercely against that happiness?

All these things passed through his mind swiftly and vaguely, an emotion rather than a thought: an emotion of mingled anger and pity—a strange anger and a strange pity that he could not understand. Vaguely he sensed the existence in her of a tragically divided mind, torn between the desire to sink deep into the lap of that simple and traditional domesticity she had been experiencing, and the fear of some profound hurt and shame in making that surrender in vain. . . .

But if he sensed this struggle in her, it was not very clearly, and it was obscured by his effort to think the situation out in logical terms. "Confound it," he thought, "if we live in town, we *must* live in an apartment—and all apartments are more or less alike. Of course, some are bigger than others. It is probably the cramped space that she objects to, after that house in the country. Well, if I get my raise —let me see. . . ."

Across the aisle were two women interestedly talking with each other, one of them a young mother, with a rather frightened little tow-headed boy of a year old in her lap. He had been enduring this strange adventure rather stoically, but he felt neglected, and his lips were curving down further and further toward the danger point of tears. He

was feeling very sorry for himself. . . . Rose-Ann had watched the small lips begin to twist and the round chin begin to tremble, and she leaned forward and smiled at him—a smile which interested him, which he considered hesitantly, and at last found irresistible and answered wholeheartedly with a beaming one of his own. This was not such a cold and indifferent world after all; somebody did love him!

Rose-Ann looked up, rather furtively, at Felix, who was engaged in computing his rent-paying capacity. The women got out at the next stop, and she leaned back in her seat.

"Some time," Felix was saying, "we might be able to have a house in the country like Clive's. . . ."

"We don't want a house in the country," said Rose-Ann energetically. "What would we do with a house in the country? No, we want a place in town, convenient to our work, yours and mine."

"Your work?—you mean your dramatic class?" asked Felix, reflecting that Rose-Ann was rather changeable. Only a few days ago she had hated to come to town. . . .

"No—I mean a real job. I don't know what, yet. But I'm going to get one. I'm tired of playing with children."

Felix looked at her vaguely, still doing sums in his head. And for a moment he seemed to her very stupid. And perhaps he was. Yet it is an exacting demand to make upon a young husband that he be able to read his wife's mind, and know the wishes which she will not even admit the existence of to herself!

They reached Woods Point, and took a waiting taxi.

"If I only knew what you really want!" he said, as they started up their path.

"What I really want?"

"Yes. All places to live in are more or less alike."

"Oh! No, they're not, Felix. There are enough odd corners left in a city like Chicago to provide for the few odd people like us who don't want the same things everybody else does. Don't fear, we shall find something, sooner or later!"

"But when and how?" Felix demanded impatiently. "We

must live somewhere while we are looking for this Utopia!"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," said Rose-Ann. . . . An idea, a whimsical and perverse idea, had just come into her mind—an idea that hurt her at first by its flagrant rebellious malice, and then suddenly took possession of her, and seemed eminently sane and reasonable. "I've been thinking of it all day," she said—and as she spoke it seemed to her a mature and long-considered plan. She took his arm persuasively. "Felix, we have a whole lifetime ahead of us—and it is more important for us to live the kind of life we want to, than just to be together for a week or two. If we take the kind of place we don't want, we shall settle down there and be like everybody else, and it will take years to break free. . . . Suppose we weren't married yet—we would decide on how and where we wanted to live, first; and we would take whatever little time was necessary to work out our practical arrangements before we did commence living together. . . ."

Why, yes, perhaps—though this, Felix reflected wistfully, was not the spirit in which they had acted on that Saturday . . . ages ago it seemed, when they had left the hospital to be married. But what in the world was she getting at?

"Felix, dear, would you think it so terrible for us to live apart a little while, you at your place and I at mine, until we get a place we really want—?"

He understood her argument now, and to his mind it seemed one reasonable enough. He had, in the past, sometimes argued in favour of lovers keeping their own separate establishments. And a mere temporary separation, for any good reason, and however in defiance of custom, was something which he could expect himself to view calmly. But his reason was not for the moment in control of the situation. The blood mounted to his head in a dizzying rush of anger, his cheeks burned, and, with an effort to control himself, he said coldly: "No, I would not consider that idea for a moment." And then, losing control of himself,

he added: "If you want to leave me, Rose-Ann, you can do it right now. But there won't be any coming back. Do you understand?"

He was astonished at himself for that speech, and still more astonished at its results. Rose-Ann dropped his arm, looked at him, and then, under his indignant glance, suddenly melted to tears.

"But, Felix!" she cried, and came and clung to his arm desperately. "I didn't mean that! Oh, Felix!" and as they reached their door, she flung herself unrestrainedly on his breast.

"Felix! forgive me! I will do whatever you want. I will live anywhere you say. I will be good, truly I will!"

He petted her, and kissed her cheek, and drew her inside, infinitely astonished. He had impulsively accused her of some horrid disloyalty, some crime against him which he could not even name, and of which he did not for a moment believe her guilty, whatever it might be: and she had confessed it in tears, and promised to be "good"! They had had a battle over something which neither of them understood, some issue which neither could believe really existed—but a battle nevertheless—conducted with mysterious threats on both sides, and now ended in tears and forgiveness as mysterious! A battle over what? He did not know. He only knew that somehow he was the victor.

But how take advantage of a victory which one does not understand?

"Yes," said Rose-Ann fervently, kissing him amid her tears with what seemed a new access of passion. "How foolish to think of being apart—even for a while!"

"Not foolish, exactly," said Felix, beginning to be a little ashamed of himself. "I'm sorry I was so unreasonably angry at you. . . . I know that love ought not to be too —too possessive. I don't want you to feel that I *own* you! . . ."

"But you *do* own me," Rose-Ann whispered, pressing his hand against her bosom, "I am yours, all of me. Do

you know it? Do you realize how much I am yours, Felix? I—it isn't enough, what I give you. I want to suffer for you, for us. Do you understand that, Felix?"

No, Felix did not really understand that cry from the depths below Rose-Ann's conscious thoughts of life and love; but then, neither did Rose-Ann.

Book Four

Fifty-seventh Street

XXI. Advancement

I

WHEN they took the train to town on Monday morning, the question of where they were to live was still undecided. Rose-Ann had put the matter unreservedly in Felix's hands; she had told him in detail and without prejudice the merits and demerits of the various apartments she had seen. But he felt incompetent to arrive at a decision in such a matter; and after all, he did not want to do anything which would not have Rose-Ann's real approval. He distrusted this mood of utter surrender to his will, and he sought to make her reassume the burden of judgment.

He suggested again the possibility of having a house in the country; and she discussed that possibility in a practical spirit. They could rent some small house in Woods Point for the summer; it would cost only a hundred dollars or so for the season—or they might find something they liked that was for sale.

It was easier to buy a house, it appeared, than Felix had thought; there was usually a mortgage to be taken over, and one needed only keep up the interest on that; the actual cash need be only a little, five hundred dollars, or at most a thousand. To Felix this seemed a great deal, but Rose-Ann explained casually that she could borrow it from her brothers in Springfield, and if need be give a second mortgage; so that only the interest would have to be paid for the time being. And the interest on both debts would be less than the rent they would pay in town.

Felix had never understood these things very well, and buying a house seemed amazingly simple—one need not work and save for years, one bought the house first, even

though one had no money! Of course, there were the mortgages, of which Felix retained a somewhat sinister notion from his childhood fiction-reading; but Rose-Ann seemed to regard them as a commonplace. . . .

If he only knew what she really wanted!

It ended by his suggesting, half-jestingly, that they go and live in a hotel until they could decide what to do; and she agreed, saying that she knew of a good family hotel, in Hyde Park, not expensive—the St. Dunstan. So it was at the St. Dunstan that they engaged, by telephone from Woods Point, a room for the following week. During that week Rose-Ann could settle up her affairs at Community House, Felix could get reacquainted with his job, and they could decide on a place to live.

2

They parted at the station, and Felix went to the office. It was strange to take his place at his desk again. It seemed as though he had been away a thousand years; he had the feeling of a truant who has returned to school and wonders if he will ever catch up with his lessons. . . . Mr. Devoe had said to come in and see him when he got back. But Harris sent him out on an interview the first thing, and when he had finished writing it, Mr. Devoe was out in the composing room overseeing some change in the editorial page. Felix did not like to bother him. Doubtless he had spoken lightly, and had already forgotten what he had said to Felix.

As Felix sat idly before his typewriter, Hawkins came up. "Glad to see you back," he said, and shook hands. And then: "Come in my office, will you?"

One of the last things Felix had done before falling ill was to "do" a play for Hawkins, on a night when there were two openings. His way of doing plays was so unlike Hawkins's serious method of assigning praise and blame that he had been afraid Hawkins would never ask him to do another; but he had been encouraged by Willie's laughter at his piece of foolery, and Clive's only half-ironical

remark: "When Willie Smith enjoys a piece of writing, you can figure on ten thousand other people liking it, too!" The idea of those ten thousand other people liking his whimsical criticism had offset the supposedly unfavorable judgment of the serious Hawkins.

"Sit down," said Hawkins. "I suppose"—with an embarrassed air—"you've heard I'm writing a play." Then, more cheerfully, "Well, I want to get as much time away from the office as possible, so I've persuaded Devoe to let me have an assistant. Would you like the job?"

Felix flushed with incredulous pleasure. "All right," Hawkins went on. "There's a certain amount of detail to be attended to—making up the Saturday dramatic page, selecting the pictures and arranging the layout, seeing publicity people or letting them see you, once a week—that sort of thing. You can take all that off my hands, besides doing some of the shows for me. There's two opening tonight, and I'd like to have you do one of them." He felt in his pocket, and took out two envelopes. A little apologetically, he said, "I'm sending you to the one I don't want to do myself—but you'll get a chance at the real shows a little later. All right?"

"I'm—everlastingly grateful to you," said Felix. "Is this all settled with—with Mr. Devoe?"

"Oh, yes. You made quite a hit with the Old Man, you know—something you wrote in that thing you did for me—something about the fatted laugh and the prodigal joke—I forget, but he went around the shop all morning that day repeating it to everybody. Yes, the Old Man thinks you're all right. You'd better go in and see him; not now—I want to tell you some more about this job. Have a cigarette?"

It appeared that Felix was to commence his duties at once, taking a desk in Hawkins' office and the title of assistant dramatic editor. He would be relieved of his regular work as a reporter, but he would be expected to help along a little with the editorial page, especially in the summer, when there would be hardly any theatrical stuff to take care of. And

there was to be a small raise in salary; he would get thirty dollars a week—to begin with, as Hawkins put it.

These happy prospects were confirmed by a brief interview with Mr. Devoe, who seemed to beam on Felix with paternal benevolence. "I think we've found the right place for you," he said. And then his eyes narrowed and his lips straightened. "You can prove whether we are right or not," he said sternly, and held out his hand in a formal gesture.

"Yes, sir—thank you!" said Felix, a little frightened, and went out.

3

Felix went to Canal street that afternoon to remove his things and give up the room. He told the news of his marriage and advancement to Roger and Don with something of the feeling of revisiting the scenes of childhood and finding one's old friends still playing at marbles, astonishingly not grown up. But Roger and Don did not sense his secret scorn; at least they maintained their customary imperturbable air.

"Rose-Ann Prentiss? Who is she? What does she do?" they asked, and when they learned that she was not an artist, not a writer, not even an interior decorator, they raised their eyebrows and went back to their Flaubert.

Rose-Ann herself, that night, took his news calmly enough. It seemed that there was no surprising her with any such good fortune; it was as if she had expected it all along!

She dressed with particular care for dinner and the theatre that evening, considering and rejecting half a dozen frocks before she decided upon a quite simple tight-bodiced black velvet thing that made her seem very pale and her hair a flaming red. This was the first time that Felix had seen her wardrobe, and he was much impressed. "I've never seen you in anything but your working clothes, have I!" he laughed. "I like you, dressed up!"

"Oh, these are all old things," she said; and Felix wondered why women always said that, when one praised anything they wore. "But," she said, "I do look rather nice in this

evening dress," and she held up a shimmering fluid thing of blue and silver that did not seem to Felix like a dress at all, but like a moonlit fountain dripping silver spray. "I'd wear this if you'd get some evening clothes yourself."

"What do I want of evening clothes?" he protested, his pleasure in the sight of that lovely garment gone with the threatening onset of sartorial obligations of his own.

"I should think a dramatic critic might very well have evening clothes," said Rose-Ann mildly.

"I'm only half a dramatic critic," objected Felix.

"Well," said Rose-Ann, "that being the case, I wouldn't insist on full-dress. I'll be content if you come half way. I mean, dinner clothes. It's the silly long-tailed coat that you object to, isn't it? I don't like it myself. Dinner clothes would be very becoming to you, though."

"But I haven't any money—" he began.

"Felix," she said, "how many times must we argue that out? If you haven't any money, I have—not much, but enough to get ourselves started on. And do you want me to let it lie in the bank at Springfield while we do without things we need? You want me to look nice, don't you? And if I didn't have a decent dress to go to the theatre with you in, and you could help me get one, you'd want to, wouldn't you?"

"Do I look so bad as all that?" he asked, looking down at his rather worn blue serge suit.

"You look very nice, Felix," she said, coming over and kissing him. "But you do need some new clothes, that's a fact. And really, if you're going to be a dramatic critic—. As long as we bought our own seats, in the balcony, it was all right to go in our 'working clothes.' But I think—"

"Oh, all right!" he said gloomily.

4

Nevertheless, the prospect of evening clothes did not spoil his enjoyment of the play and Rose-Ann. It was a rather silly play, and they bubbled over with amused comments upon it on their way back to the St. Dunstan.

"I must remember all these things, and put them into my criticism," he remarked.

"Why don't you write it tonight," she said.

"At the hotel? I haven't a typewriter, for one thing."

"But I have mine. Why don't you say it off to me, and I'll take it down. Then you'll have it over with, and we can mail it tonight, and then we can talk as late as we want to, without having to think of getting-up-time in the morning. Now that you're a dramatic critic, you don't have to keep such regular working hours."

Really, it seemed an admirable plan. "But won't the other people in the hotel object to a typewriter being pounded at this hour of the night?"

"Let them! If they complain, we'll say we're sorry, and promise not to do it again! And by the next time, we'll be in some place of our own where we can pound a typewriter all night if we want to—I hope!"

Felix stored that away in his memory as one of Rose-Ann's specifications for a place to live—a place where one could run a typewriter all night. . . . It was going to be hard to find such a place!

Rose-Ann exchanged her black velvet frock for a flame-coloured kimono—which, as he noted, matched her hair when the light shone through its stray curls—and sat down at the typewriter.

"Ready!"

Felix dictated for half an hour, only occasionally thinking of their neighbours on the other side of these thin hotel partitions. Still, it was not yet midnight. "I guess that's enough," he said at last.

"A good line to end on," she agreed, finishing the sentence and typing his name underneath. "There are stamps in my pocketbook, Felix—and here's your envelope, all addressed. It will make the one o'clock collection, and we can breakfast at leisure."

"But," he said, pausing at the door, "suppose it got lost in the mails or something!"

"I made a carbon," said Rose-Ann, "and you can take that

with you when you go to the office, in case of emergencies."

"You *are* an efficient little manageress!" he said.

5

Obediently the next day he went to a tailor—recommended by Clive, who seemed heartily to approve of this particular surrender to convention—and was measured for a dinner coat, and a new loose-fitting suit of brown homespun selected by Rose-Ann.

He found he did not mind the idea of wearing evening clothes after all. He only wished that—well, that he was going to pay for them himself!

XXII. Mainly About Clothes

I

AND still they found no place to live, and their week at the St. Dunstan became as second, and a third.

They went together to look at dozens of apartments. Rose-Ann was observantly critical of their good and bad features, and yet extremely complaisant; he felt that she would have agreed to anything he wanted. But he had not forgotten her fierce discontent at "ordinary" apartments, and he was looking for something that would really please her. He felt that he had not found it yet. . . .

And no one at the St. Dunstan had objected to the noise of their typewriter on occasional evenings. They could have breakfast brought up and set down on a tray at their bedside, a breakfast of cool grapefruit and elaborately disguised eggs and coffee with cream, and linger over their last sip of coffee and a final cigarette before dressing lazily; and Felix could stroll into the office at ten o'clock, like Hawkins—a free man and not a hurried, anxious slave.

Felix had at first felt a little guilty about these late appearances, when everybody else had been at work for hours; but it was apparently expected of him that he would take due advantage of the opportunities for leisure that the position gave. So long as he did his work, it did not matter when he came or went; Hawkins himself did not show up every day—and there was that god-like being, the literary editor, McQuish, he who had taught the Chicago intelligentsia to speak of their "reactions" and of being "intrigued": he fulminated his Wednesday critiques locked in his office on Tuesday afternoon and except for his Tuesday arrival and departure was never seen around the place at all!

Felix's new loose-fitting homespun clothes, with their air of having been worn in to town from a country-club, helped Felix to feel the rightful possessor of this leisure, and to assume its proper air. Silk shirts with soft collars, and Windsor ties, bought by Rose-Ann, and approved by Clive, helped still more.

After all, if the management liked his work, if he was no longer on trial, but an accepted person, privileged to do about as he pleased, why should he maintain his old anxieties and disguises? Why try to look like an efficient young business man? Nobody wanted him to! Why not be comfortable, in a soft collar and homespun clothes? Yes, why not?

In this mood, he bought himself a stick, on his own initiative. . . . He had always wanted to carry a stick, and had never quite dared. His clothes had never been quite up to it. Perhaps they were not quite up to it now. But there was nothing dandified about this stick; it was no silver-plated confection, just a simple stick of light bamboo, covered with a shiny black lacquer—a real stick. It suited him; he liked the smooth firm lacquered surface, he liked the feel of it in his hand, lightly swinging, or hanging from the crook of his arm. And Rose-Ann liked it, too. He felt that it gave him the touch of confidence he had lacked in his new position; with that stick on his arm, he could saunter into the Chronicle office at ten o'clock in the morning without a qualm.

2

Just after his evening clothes were finished, they were invited casually to one of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Morgan's evenings, and Felix was assured by Rose-Ann that it was an occasion which a dinner coat would appropriately grace; she also remarked that ordinary clothes would be all right. That seemed to make it rather a test of his moral courage, and so he wore his evening clothes. . . .

Howard Morgan was a poet, one of the few in America for whom Felix had any respect. Felix had been introduced

to him once, under rather inauspicious circumstances—one evening when, deep in kalsomine, he was painting a back drop for Rose-Ann in the little Community Theatre, which the great man was being shown, in what was apparently a tour of inspection of Community House. Rose-Ann had met him then, too, and, less abashed by her kalsomine-smeared apron and hastily turbaned hair, had talked with him; and he had remembered her, and sent a message by some one in Community House to come up to his next "Friday evening" and bring her husband.

Felix was glad to pay his respects to this distinguished personage, but he was not prepared for the crowd of people who filled the Morgans' drawing-room; he hated crowds. But, after Mrs. Morgan had introduced him to an elderly and talkative spinster, and then, as he felt, basely deserted him, he was rescued by Rose-Ann; steered through a whirlpool of encounters—he almost failed to recognize Clive Bangs in *his* evening clothes, with that wild lock of hair neatly slicked into its proper place—and brought into the presence of Howard Morgan himself, who was standing, a tall and impressive figure, with grey hair, a nose like an eagle's beak, and flashing eyes, in the midst of, as it seemed to Felix, swirling tides of people. Morgan turned from two women, one very old and the other very young, with whom he was conducting two different conversations at once—a flirtatious one with the aged dame and a very earnest and serious one with the young girl.

"The last time I saw you, you were painting scenery," he said, smilingly extending his hand.

"Yes," said Felix, flushing.

"And now I read your dramatic criticisms in the Chronicle," said Howard Morgan. "You seem to have a multitude of talents! No wonder you have captured that lovely prize!—She is lovely, isn't she?" he added, in a tone of man-to-manly confidence, looking after Rose-Ann, who had floated away in that dress which was like moonlit falling water.

"Yes," said Felix, feeling very stupid.

"Do you know Mrs. Meagham? Mr. Fay. . . ." And the great man, who had retained Felix's hand in his, pressed it warmly, smiled with his big delicately-carven mouth and his cavernous, flashing eyes, and turned back to resume with instant interest his conversations with the young woman and the old one, not to speak of a third who came up and was welcomed heartily in the midst of a sentence; leaving Felix to the mercies of Mrs. Meagham.

It appeared that Mrs. Meagham had no wish to detain Felix Fay; it was the great man, Howard Morgan, that she wanted to talk to. And Felix had no wish to prevent her —none whatever; only he was between her and the great man and he didn't know how to get out of the way.

How does one leave a lady whom one does not want to talk to, and who obviously enough reciprocates that lack of interest? Felix hadn't the slightest idea. . . . He ransacked his memory of books—while saying to Mrs. Meagham that no, he had not lived in Chicago long—for something to help him. Surely in all the novels he had read there must be something bearing upon this situation! But the only thing he could remember was the desperate device of H. G. Wells' Mr. Polly, who upon one embarrassing occasion murmured to the young woman something about a "little dog," and ran out of the house. But then, Mr. Polly had a bicycle, and he was pretending that he heard a little dog gnawing at the tires. No—that would not do at all. He suddenly felt that H. G. Wells was but a poor guide and mentor in the thorny ways of real life. Perhaps if he had forced himself to read more of Henry James—!

At this stage, when he felt his reason going, Rose-Ann appeared, radiant and cool, to his rescue. He was so grateful that he forgot to note how she did it. . . . It had been easy enough, apparently; no such heroic task as it appeared. But then, things like that *were* easy, to anybody except himself!

And he had not told Howard Morgan how much he liked —how devoutly he knew by heart—the magnificent "Ode in the Valley of Decision." No, he had stood there saying,

"Yes," like a fool, while a great poet paid *him* compliments! He thought a little the less of Howard Morgan for those compliments; they were so obviously a product of the occasion, a few out of the hundred he had uttered that night —two or three around to everybody, share and share alike! They were none the less banal because he uttered them with such pretended sincerity and real grace. What madness such a scene was! To think of men and women deliberately inflicting upon themselves such painful mockery of social intercourse! But perhaps it was not painful to them. No, they actually appeared to enjoy it. Well—that proved that they were mad! Bedlam! And a great poet condemned to go through this rigmarole, so abominable to any person of decent sensitiveness! But perhaps he enjoyed it, too? In truth, he did seem to be enjoying it vastly. Then he was no poet, but a sham. . . . A line of the great Ode came into Felix's mind, one of the magnificent lines: he said it over to himself, testing it—and it did sound rather tinny. Milton and some base amalgam, not true gold. . . . An actor, the fellow was, strutting and smirking and kissing ladies' hands. . . . Still—if it were a thing that had to be done (like wearing evening clothes, for instance) doubtless the more gracefully it was done the better. And Howard Morgan—it must be conceded —did it superlatively well! . . . Would Rose-Ann never be ready to go home?

Rose-Ann, in their room afterward, remarked upon how well Howard Morgan had "played the host."

"Yes," said Felix. ". . . I felt utterly lost, myself."

She turned to him fondly. "You were doing very well, darling. I noticed at the time. It's just your inexperience that made you feel a trifle ill at ease. With a little more experience, you will be quite as charming as Howard Morgan. More so, darling!"

3

Tell one whom you have caused to be waylaid and tortured by cruel savages, that he has passed through the

incident very creditably; tell him that with a little more practice he will be able to wear the true martyr's look of joy! And then kiss him. . . . Yes, and pretend that you love him, that you are the wife of his bosom. Ah, serpent! Delilah!

That was the way Felix felt as he lay sleeplessly at Rose-Ann's side that night; but he knew perfectly well why he felt that way. He was just looking for an excuse to get out of taking a little trouble. . . . Of course things like that went hard, at first; so was walking hard to a child who had just begun fearfully to stand upon its two feet; so was breathing hard at first for the new-born infant—did it not greet the world with a cry of pain? Yes, life was hard; that was why it was so interesting. It would be dull if one never did anything one was afraid to do. . . . And why, at the age of twenty-two, should he still find it an agony to meet a roomful of people? . . . No, confound it, that wasn't true! There were roomfuls of people he could meet, with pleasure; it was *these* people—they meant nothing to him, he nothing to them. . . . Or was it just egotism? Was it because he *was* nothing to them, that he resented their presence? Was it just the feeling of mother's little boy who goes out to play and finds that instead of being the Young Prince, he is only one of a crowd? He remembered his first day in school—the humiliation of suddenly finding himself nobody in particular! . . . Yes, he had gone there that evening as if he alone in the world had ever admired Howard Morgan —and found himself merely one of dozens. He had hoped to impress the great man by his admiration; and he had found his admiration not at all needed. That was why he was angry at his hero! . . . And then, too, perhaps a little jealous. As if he had thought, "I could get the same kind of worship if I would condescend to pay for it in the same way you do!" But could he? Was he, too, in spite of his protestations to Rose-Ann, secretly dreaming of greatness? Was it because this man dared admit himself a poet, a creator, a Somebody, that Felix

Fay disliked him?—And what was he doing to realize those dreams? It was all very well to say, "Some day!" But—no, his destiny wasn't just writing silly-clever things for the Chronicle. But what was it? Rose-Ann believed in him. Did he believe in himself?

And all this was far enough away from the question at issue: which was very simple—in fact, it resolved itself down to one thing—doing what Rose-Ann wanted him to do! Not because she was his wife; not at all because he loved her; but because she understood life better than he did. . . .

He must never let her know what a baby he was about things like these. What a silly fuss he had been making about nothing at all! He must do what was expected of him: yes, confound it, and if she wanted a house like the Morgans', and crowds of people . . . he could see with half-dreaming mind her white shoulders, her eyes, her red-gold hair, gleaming in their midst—why, she should have them! . . . even if he had to "play the host," like Howard Morgan, for her.

. . . He fell asleep and awoke dreaming that he was a little boy, who was captured by savages and tortured, and who endured it all with a smile for the sake of their Queen, a girl with white shoulders and red hair, who had promised to tell him a secret if he was brave. And he said: "I know your secret! You are all the women I have ever known; you are the little girl I was afraid to walk to school with, and you are the girl I played with in the garret and was afraid to go to meet for a farewell kiss, and you are Margaret, the girl in the candy-factory that I was afraid to write to, and you are the girl in Port Royal that I was afraid to ask to marry me." And she said, "Yes, but I have one more secret." "I know that, too," he said. "You are Life!"

A very literary dream! He wasn't sure, when he woke up at dawn, but that he had made it up like a story. Anyway, he understood it, and he didn't want to forget it, and he was writing it down hastily on sheets of hotel

stationery when Rose-Ann opened her eyes sleepily at eight o'clock. . . . She opened her eyes sleepily, but sleep vanished when she saw what he was doing, and she sat up eagerly in bed.

"Oh!" she cried, looking as though an expected, long-awaited miracle had happened at last.

"What?" he asked, startled.

"You're writing again!—writing, I mean, for yourself. . . ."

"Well, what of it?" he said crossly.

"Nothing," she said. "Only—I knew you would!"

XXIII. A Bargain in Utopias

I

BUT, even though life was much easier than he had ever dreamed it to be, though one could acquire a lovely wife without deserving her, an easy job without asking for it, and a house in the country, if one wished, without money—still, the fact remained that he was only a young newspaper man getting thirty dollars a week. And thirty dollars a week meant that he could afford to pay only thirty dollars a month for rent: he had read that in a book, and it seemed like good sound economics. And thirty dollars a month would cover only the poorest and most cramped of the apartments that Rose-Ann had viewed so judicially and, he felt, with secret disdain. By no stretch even of an magination keyed to the marvellous by recent events, could he see himself getting a place to live in that Rose-Ann would really approve. . . . And meanwhile they were living above their means—above *his* means, anyway—at the St. Dunstan. It was their fourth week there, and they were no nearer to finding a place to live in than they had been when they came. Something had to happen pretty soon.

He reminded himself that when he came to Chicago he had not expected such hospitality, such friendship, such help as he had actually received; he had never dreamed of getting a job on the Chronicle, nor of being made assistant dramatic critic . . . and least of all had he dreamed of having Rose-Ann for a wife! Such things happened, it seemed—happened to one in spite of one's stupidities and suspicions and fears. Perhaps Rose-Ann's grand house would drop from the sky in the same way; perhaps!—but to one whose mind was trained sternly in old-fashioned nineteenth century realism, it seemed merely silly . . . and

a little worse than that. He would give one more day to the deities that presided over his fantastic fortunes, and then he would take the next thirty-dollar-a-month apartment they looked at. . . . So much for that!

They were going to look at some apartments on the south side, near Jackson Park, and they had planned to meet on the steps of the Field Museum. . . . He was a little early when he left the elevated at Fifty-fifth street, and he strolled slowly over toward Jackson Park looking thoughtfully at all the apartment buildings he passed. . . . One, which looked like a place where Rose-Ann might care to live, was quite obviously beyond their means.

He turned into Fifty-seventh street, and went under the Illinois Central viaduct, passing a row of dingy brown one-story shops—at least, there was a photographer's shop among them, though the others were apparently lived in, the big plate-glass windows in front being covered with curtains. Felix wondered what kind of people lived there. As he reached the corner, just across from the green stretch of Jackson Park, it seemed that he had a chance to find out, for there stood a young woman in the doorway directing the operations of a moving man who was carrying things to a van in the street.

"Don't you *dare* drop those," the young woman was saying. "The frames are valuable anyway!"

It was an armful of large paintings that was being carried out. The young woman, a rather impressive little person, with a sturdy, plump figure, and short curly black hair, held a cigarette in her hand. A painter? Did artists live in these places?

Felix glanced past the girl into the room beyond. "May I look in?" he asked the girl.

"Sure," she said indifferently.

Felix stepped inside. It was a large room—a huge room, unpartitioned except by a flimsy screen about eight feet high which cut off the rear portion. Evidently the occupant had slept back there, and used the front part for a studio.

"You're leaving?" he asked the girl.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Looks like it," she said.

"Is it for rent?"

Of course, Rose-Ann would not want to live in a place like that, but—it interested him.

"Yes, it's for rent, if anybody wants it," she said lazily.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Felix.

She seemed to become a little more aware of him. "Are *you* thinking of taking it?" she asked.

"Maybe," said Felix.

"If you do, maybe I could persuade you to take a few things off my hands."

"What's wrong with the place?" he countered.

"Nothing's wrong with it," she said.

"Then why are you leaving?"

"Because," she said. "I don't want to build my own fires. I can't paint and look after a stove, too. Want to see my stove? It's a good stove. I'm moving to a steam-heated studio-apartment, and I shan't want it any more. There it is—"

"Oh, a Franklin stove!" he said.

"Yes, a darn nice little stove. Do you paint?"

"No."

"Write?"

"Yes."

"You'd like this place. . . . And it's dirt cheap."

"How much?"

"You wouldn't believe it. Twelve dollars."

"Twelve dollars a what?"

"A month!"

"Twelve dollars a month?" Why, his hall bedroom over on Canal street had cost more than that. . . .

"Yes, and look at the space. It's really a find. If you don't mind living in a kind of bohemian way. I'm bohemian enough, God knows, but when I get to painting I let my fire go out."

"I didn't know," said Felix, "that there were such places as this in Chicago."

"There aren't. There's just these. Here and around the

corner. They were put up for shops at the time of the World's Fair—just temporary structures—and they've never bothered to tear 'em down. There's been a bunch of artists living here ever since; a place like this for twelve dollars is a godsend to an artist. If this was spring, it wouldn't be for rent—there'd be a dozen after it. You're in luck." She resumed her neglected cigarette to keep it from going out. "Well, what do you say? Want my stove?"

"I'll—have to see my wife about it," said Felix. "She's waiting for me over in the Park." No, Rose-Ann would not like it, but—

"Your wife? Then, good-*night!* No Christian female would live in these diggings for a week—unless she was an artist's wife and couldn't help herself."

"Why not?" Felix demanded. Though this was just what he himself had been conjecturing about Rose-Ann's feelings, he found himself resenting this girl's scornful imputation to her of those same feelings.

"Well, you've seen the place," she said. "Have you noticed any bath-tub? No—the people who live in these places take their baths standing up in that iron sink there in the back. Cold water, fresh from a very cold lake! It's healthy—Spartan and all that—but no regular wife would stand for it. You'll see. Bring her over here—I'd like to watch her face when you show her around. I haven't had a good smile for a long time. Bring her over!"

"I'll do that," Felix said grimly. "You wait."

"Oh, I'll wait. Here—" to the moving man—"leave that stove alone and take a rest for about five minutes."

2

Felix had felt in the attitude of this girl artist a challenge to Rose-Ann which he was somehow anxious for her to meet. She might not like this place—but it would not be because she was a bourgeois doll, afraid to bathe standing up in an iron sink. Rose-Ann would see in this place what he saw in it, even if she did want something different. . . .

"I've been to one place already," said Rose-Ann, rising

from the steps and coming down to meet him. "It's—just like all the others."

"Well," said Felix, his voice unconsciously defiant, "I've found you a place that's different!"

"Have you really? Where is it?"

"Just over here. Right on the edge of the Park."

"I'd like that!"

"Would you like to bathe in ice-cold water, standing up in a cast iron sink?"

"Oo! I can feel the water now, oozing out of a sponge at the back of my neck! What makes you think I'm afraid of cold water? You remember my snow-baths at Woods Point? The primitive life has no terrors for me—so far as that's concerned. So there's no bathroom?"

"No."

"M-m. Well, I'll see."

"Here it is, then."

"Oh, this? An unpromising exterior. . . ."

"Here," said Felix, indicating the girl, who came to the door, "is the lady who's just leaving. And this," he said to the girl, "is my wife."

She stood aside and waved them in with a flourish of her cigarette. "Well, here it is, without one plea. See for yourself!"

"Oh!" cried Rose-Ann. "What a lovely big room!"

"It *is* big," said Felix.

"It's splendid! A real room. . . ." She drew a deep breath. "I could live in a place like this, Felix."

The girl regarded her with respectful interest, and then turned to Felix. "Did you tell her about the sink?"

"Yes," said Rose-Ann. "I know about the sink. But I think I'll inspect the sanitary details right now, before I get any more enthusiastic."

The two girls went back of the screen, talking excitedly. "Does the screen stay here?" Rose-Ann was asking. "Good! We'll sleep back here—or make it a kitchen, and sleep out in front, I don't know which. . . ."

Felix lighted a cigarette, and laughed softly to himself

at his own folly. So *this* was what Rose-Ann had wanted! This was the reality of that supposedly grandiose dream of hers, which had frightened him so much to think of making come true for her! This—twelve dollars a month—an iron sink—a Franklin stove!

So the destinies that presided over his fantastic fortunes had made good again.

How simple life was, after all!

XXIV. Studio

I

THE girls came back from inspecting the mysteries behind the screen, Rose-Ann's enthusiasm undiminished. "Where is the agent?" she demanded. "We must get this place right away, before somebody else does. . . . You want it, don't you, Felix?"

"Oh, I wanted it all along," said Felix. "Only—"

"You didn't think I would? Oh, Felix! It's just our kind of place. And twelve dollars a month! And that lovely stove!"

"How much do you want for the stove?" Felix asked the girl.

"Oh, that's all right," said the girl. "Your wife and I have settled that between us."

"She's given us the stove for a wedding-present!" said Rose-Ann. "I tried to buy it, but she wouldn't let me."

"It's no good to me any more," said the girl defensively. "And do you mind if I leave behind that old model stand? You can knock it to pieces and make kindling of it. And speaking of kindling, there's a little left there in that box, and about one shovelful of coal. I'm sorry there isn't more to start you off with."

"You're a dear to be so generous," said Rose-Ann. "And you *will* come to see us?" She turned to Felix. "Her name is Dorothy Sheridan. She rather likes us, I think, Felix. And I like her very much!"

Felix and the girl shook hands rather awkwardly. "I take back all I said about your wife," said Dorothy. "Hey, you!"—to the moving man who was lounging at the door—"that's all. The stove and the other things stay here. You've got the address. I'll be there to take in the stuff

when it comes." She held out her hand to Rose-Ann. "Good-bye. I'll drop in some evening when you've got more or less settled. Good-bye!"

2

Felix and Rose-Ann went to the landlord and were confirmed in their possession of the studio. They put up the Franklin stove again, and built a fire with the remains of Dorothy's kindling and coal, and sat there till twilight, on the low model-stand, furnishing the room in imagination.

Felix was feeling a curious emotion which was at once an immense relief and a dim perturbation. He felt now that he had never wanted to live in an ordinary apartment. He could sympathize now with all the indignant things Rose-Ann had been saying about such places. It would have meant a kind of surrender—a giving up to outward form of the special quality of their lives. . . . But he had been willing to surrender. It was strange now to realize, but it was true—he had felt that very surrender to be a part of marriage, of adjusting himself to the world of actuality. Yes, he had thought that he and Rose-Ann had to live cooped up together in a little domestic cage like other married people.

And instead they were to remain free!

For that was what living in a studio meant. They would not subordinate their individual lives to a domestic arrangement. On the contrary, all their domestic arrangements were pushed into the background. This was first of all a place for them to do their work in.

They planned for their work-tables first of all—two enormous tables that one could fill with papers and books to one's heart's content, and that never were to be disturbed, no matter how messy they looked: these, one on either side of the room, up by the front windows. And then, books—all the books they would ever want, ranged on two long shelves along the side-walls. And then two large beds, at the back of the studio, behind the screen—two, so that they could work as late at night as they wished and go

to bed without disturbing each other. And a settle in front of the fire, and chairs—ordinary kitchen chairs that they would paint in bright colours—for rest and talk and friends. And a gate-legged table that could be pushed out of the way after dinner, if they dined at home. And a tiny gas-range, and a cupboard for dishes. Coloured dishes they would be—no two alike. "I hate sets of dishes as much as I hate sets of books," said Rose-Ann. . . . And a tiny gas-range.

That gas-range was to be their least and last possession, not they its slaves!

No, they would be two artists who lived together because they loved each other, who ate when they were hungry, slept when a chapter was finished, and cooked when they thought it would be fun to eat at home!

"For instance," said Rose-Ann, "it would be fun to get dinner here tonight, but we can't. But I'll tell you—let's early in the morning go and buy beds and dishes and things, so we can move right in."

"Why not have dinner here tonight?" said Felix. "We can get it at a delicatessen and eat it with our fingers!"

"The electricity has been turned off—we can't eat in the dark," she said wistfully.

"We'll buy some candles!"

"Of course!" said Rose-Ann.

They bought candles, and bread and butter, which Felix cut and spread with his pocket-knife, and a variety of delicatessen. They made a table-cloth out of a newspaper spread on the model-stand, and sat on the floor and ate with their fingers, laughing. It made this all the more their home, thus to pioneer in it the first night. . . . They put on the last of Dorothy's coal, and then sat side by side on the bare comfortless model-stand, and, still unable to go away, talked for hours of what they would buy tomorrow, and where they would put it, while the grate cast flickering and changing lights on the ceiling. Then the fire died down, and the room became cold, and they could hear the wind roaring outside, and still they sat there, huddled to-

gether for warmth. Rose-Ann fell asleep at last with her head on Felix's shoulder and a strand of her red hair against his lips. She slept, and shivered . . . and he awoke her with kisses. And only then, and reluctantly, they went back to their hotel.

XXV. St. George of the Minute

I

WITHIN less than two weeks the studio was furnished, according to their desire; and not only furnished, but painted and kalsomined, in a light creamy yellow with a bright green-blue trim—a most cheerful and, as they felt, out-door effect! And old Mrs. Perk had been brought from Community House to sew the tall orange silk window-curtains. . . . "It's like painting the scenery and setting the stage for a play," said Rose-Ann. "Only this play is to run for—for as long as we like."

When it was all finished, "Now let's ask Clive out to see it!" she said.

"Oh—all right," said Felix.

"You haven't liked Clive ever since the wedding, have you?" observed Rose-Ann.

"He behaved so queerly!" said Felix. "But he does seem to have become rather human again."

"People do behave queerly at weddings," said Rose-Ann. "Always. If it isn't one way, it's another. They cry, or get drunk, or something. There've been four weddings in my family—five, with mine—and I can assure you this one was the sanest of the lot. And they always make the same jokes, too. You remember, when Clive offered to marry me himself—I've heard that one every time. I know you were bothered; but it's the regular thing. People can't help it. And it's the regular thing, too, for the groom to be frightfully angry at his best man."

"And it's the regular thing for the young people to be perfectly crazy about their new house, too, I suppose," Felix

said thoughtfully. "Well—I'm glad if other people have as much fun about it all as we do!"

"Oh, but they don't!" Rose-Ann said confidently.

2

Clive came, and saw, and approved. And after dinner, when the gate-legged table had been pushed back against the wall, and they were comfortably disposed about the fire, Rose-Ann said:

"Do you remember, Clive, you promised to tell us a story?"

"A story? Yes, so I did. Well, I will tell you a story about St. George and the Village Dragon."

He lighted a cigarette. "This particular village is situated, as the story-books say, not a thousand miles from Chicago. It has a Dragon there, which—. But let me drop the epic style. The fact is, that in this village there are three classes of people, each of which strictly avoids the others—though they maintain casually friendly relations, and say 'Good Morning' when they meet in the post-office. The three classes are, first, the villagers proper, the original inhabitants of the place; second, the summer people; and third, a few artists and writers.

"The village people live in the village, and keep themselves to themselves; the summer people live in boarding houses and in nice new bungalows on the edge of town, and associate with each other; and the artists and writers live out in the more inaccessible regions, perched on the edges of ravines, and turn up their noses at everybody else.

"The fact is that they are afraid of some sort of social infection or contamination from each other's manners and morals. They all secretly despise each other; the writers and artists despise the summer bourgeoisie, and the villagers sell them groceries and taxi them home from the station and despise them both.

"And yet once in a while some young person of one group happens not to despise some young person from one of the other groups. Then everybody else becomes very much alarmed. . . . Two years ago, it was a young man in the

summer colony and a village girl. Everybody—in the summer colony and the village—was afraid something terrible would happen. The villagers have a story about a girl who was betrayed and deserted by a gilded youth who owned an automobile—and she drowned herself in the Lake. And the summer colony has an even more heart-rending legend about a foolish boy who married a pretty village girl and took her to the city, and she couldn't speak grammatically, and so on: a dreadful story! Well, the young man in the summer colony and the village girl, two years ago, hadn't heard these stories, it seems; at any rate, they went to dances together —and the whole community waited, fluttering with horror —until the young man and the girl, finding themselves the objects of universal anxiety, became frightened of each other, and stopped seeing one another at all. They realized in time that they were violating a social taboo. . . . That's the introduction to my story.

"Well, the taboo operates even more powerfully to prevent any friendships between the villagers and us ravine-folk. Our young men haven't got any money or automobiles, and the village girls don't know how to talk about art. I don't know why that should make such a difference, but it seems to. Besides, we hardly ever meet them. We don't go to the local dances; and when we go in swimming, we go up the Lake to some place where we don't have to wear bathing suits. The only young woman in the village with whom we are likely to exchange a dozen words in as many weeks is the daughter of the man who owns one of the cars that meet people at the station, and who occasionally drives us home herself.

"But, after all,"—he paused, and blew a cloud of smoke up toward the ceiling, "even Woods Point is part of the modern world. Anything can happen there. It's not impossible that a girl should be born in Woods Point who went to the public library and got hold of Shaw and Galsworthy and H. G. Wells, and dreamed of going to Chicago and getting a job and living her own life—and yet who, being a girl, stayed on in Woods Point."

"Yes," said Felix, "I can understand that."

"I can't," said Rose-Ann. "How old was she?"

"Nineteen."

"Well—go on," said Rose-Ann. "Perhaps I'm wrong."

"That girl," said Clive, "wouldn't be particularly interested in the summer boarders. But she would be interested in the writers and artists out on the edge of the ravines. She would hear the gossip about their 'queer doin's' "—he smiled, and looked at Rose-Ann—"about how they run around in the snow without a stitch of clothes on! for instance. . . ."

"Goodness!" said Rose-Ann, "who could have seen me?"

"Us village folks hears about everything that's goin' on!" said Clive. "Well—this girl would hear about these crazy artists, and their crazy talk, and their crazy parties—and she would feel that she understood these people, that she belonged among them. But she would never have talked to a living soul about the things that interested her. She would be inarticulate. And if any of these artists or writers *had* talked to her for a passing moment, they would never have guessed that she was anything but what she seemed—a village girl.

"She might see a good deal of these people, first and last. She might be the girl who drove them home from the station in her father's car, who came for them after midnight at the end of one of their crazy parties. And none of them would ever guess—why should he?—that the girl who honked the horn impatiently for them out in the road, would go home and read 'Man and Superman' in bed, and then cry herself to sleep.

"Unless, perhaps, one of the ravine-folk happened to be a man of a very curious and inquiring disposition, who never took anything at its face-value—who doubted everything—even the villageness of village girls. . . . He might ask her one day—and wouldn't it be absurd? can you imagine anything more ridiculous to ask a village girl, out of a clear sky—'Did you ever read Bernard Shaw?' And she might reply very quietly, 'Yes, every play I could get hold of.' "

"Well!" said Rose-Ann.

"You can see what might happen. . . . Those people would want to see more of each other. And you can imagine some of the difficulties. Why, they might as well have belonged to the Montagues and the Capulets! You can imagine the talk—about two people who only wanted a chance for a little literary conversation!"

"Only, Clive?" asked Rose-Ann.

"At first, anyway. But with that atmosphere of intrigue and suspicion, their meetings would assume a romantic colouring—inevitably. . . . To such a man, that girl with her need for ideas, for talk, for companionship, might be very appealing. And to her, in her isolation and ignorance, he might appear as a very superior, a very wonderful person indeed. . . . He would lend her books, and talk with her, and urge her to go to Chicago and get some kind of a job. He would talk to her about love—"

"In short," said Felix, "he would fall in love with her!"

Clive shook his head. "He would know better than that. He would know that what she really needed was Chicago, and friends, and work, and adventure. . . ."

Felix reflected that Clive could have offered her all these things. . . .

"And what happened?" asked Rose-Ann.

"He couldn't persuade her to take the plunge into life in Chicago without some kind of preparation. . . . She's terribly afraid of Chicago. . . . So she's worked out a solution of her own. She's gone off to a normal school, to learn to be a school-teacher; and get a job in Chicago that way. . . . Worse than that—she's going to teach somewhere else first, for some damned reason, and later go to Chicago. I tell her, yes, when she's forty, she'll be ready to begin life!"

"So that," Felix said, "was what was troubling you all winter. I thought you were trying to get some girl to marry you; and you were merely trying to get her to go to Chicago and get a job!"

"Am I to be given no credit for the disinterested and unselfish character of my worrying?" Clive asked gaily.

"I don't imagine the girl gives you much credit for it," said Felix. "Why don't you marry her and be done with it?"

"Good heavens!" said Clive. "Must one marry a girl because he has talked to her about Bernard Shaw?"

"Must St. George marry the girl he has rescued from the dragon?" Felix retorted. "I only know it always happens in the story-books that way."

"A fine realist you are, young man! Fortunately, there are other St. Georges in the world.—Why this sudden passion of matrimonial propaganda? Misery loves company?"

"I wouldn't worry about Phyllis if I were you," Rose-Ann said to Felix coolly. "She's perfectly able to take care of herself. Her plan is all right. She's very young, and it won't do her any harm to wait a year or two and learn a trade before she comes here to live. I think she's a very sensible young woman, myself."

It was time for Clive to go, for he was living out at Woods Point again. They discussed the studio for a few minutes, and then Felix put on his hat and accompanied Clive to the platform of the Illinois Central station a block away.

"Spring!" said Clive, sniffing the mild March breeze. "Tomorrow will be warm."

"Clive," said Felix, "what's the matter with you, anyway? You're really in love with Phyllis!"

"Who knows?" said Clive. "Sometimes I think I am, myself!"

"Well, then?"

"But there's another question you haven't considered. Is she in love with me?"

"Ask her and find out!"

"Oh, I've no doubt she thinks she is, at this moment. Just because I don't seem to care whether she is or not! She's a queer girl, Felix. You don't understand her at all. . . ."

"You exasperate me," said Felix. "Marry her, and put an end to all this foolishness."

"But why should you assume that my intentions—if I have any—are honourable, young man! What makes you

think I want to get married to anybody? I think I'll wait and see how your marriage turns out first!"

Felix walked home slowly, but it seemed only an instant before he opened the door of the studio. "Who is it?" called Rose-Ann from behind the screen. "It's me," he said, and locked the door, and stood there for a moment. . . . He felt a kind of vague bewilderment.

He had been so immersed in the story of these other unhappy lives, so poignantly concerned with their tangled doubts and fears, that it was strange to return to this scene of his own untroubled happiness. The sense of those other tormented lives burned at this moment more vividly in his imagination than his own life and Rose-Ann's. . . .

"Coming to bed?" Rose-Ann called from behind the screen.

"No," he said vaguely, "I think I'll write for a while."

"All right, then I won't bother you. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Rose-Ann."

He went over to his desk, and turned on the electric light, and dipped his pen in the ink, and then sat dreaming before a white sheet of paper.

XXVI. What Rose-Ann Wanted

I

"WHY don't you want me to get a job, Felix?" It was mid-April, and the Park across the way had, all at once, turned that lovely young green of beginning grass and burgeoning trees. It was dusk, and Rose-Ann and Felix were sitting in their cushioned window-seat—a new addition to the household furnishing—arguing a point which had been coming up from time to time since their marriage.

"You have your work," she went on.

"Yes," he said, "and I'm doing all Hawkins's work now, and in the fall I will get a respectable salary, I expect, so why need we—"

"I don't mean that," she said. "I mean your writing." Ever since that morning at the St. Dunstan, Felix had been writing at odd times, at—heaven knew just what, he wasn't sure himself—something that might perhaps be called a play, but so fantastic a thing as yet that he had not even ventured to show any of the fragments of it to Rose-Ann; she had been very nice about it, too, never asking him to let her see what he had done the night before . . . to furnish the justification, as it were, for staying up until all hours. Felix wasn't at all certain that they constituted such a justification. They were probably mere folly: but, so far, they were all he could attempt.

"You have your writing," Rose-Ann was saying. "And I haven't anything."

"You used to write, Rose-Ann," he said.

"I know. Not much."

"You need not have given up your class at Community House," he suggested.

"It wasn't enough, any longer. I want something else."

"What?"

"I don't know. Something to use up my energies. I can't stay here and play keeping house in a studio. There's no excuse for it. That's why we have a studio, Felix! So we can each be free. Why are you so stubborn about it?"

"I'm not being stubborn, Rose-Ann. I'm just being candid. I can't stop you from going out and getting a job. But I can tell the truth and say I don't like the idea! And that's all I can do. If it means so much to you, you'll have to do it in spite of my not liking it, that's all. . . . It isn't as if there were some particular thing you wanted to do—I wouldn't say a word against that. But work in general—work for the sake of work—that just means a little more money, which we don't need, and your coming home tired at night. . . . After all, Rose-Ann, I want a wife. . . . "

She grew suddenly cold. "Then you should have married somebody else," she said. "I don't want to be—a wife!"

And they went out to dinner in an estranged silence.

2

These silences, inexplicable and impenetrable, would spring up between them, and then as inexplicably dissolve—sometimes in tears, sometimes in laughter.

That night when they came home to their studio and started to undress for bed, Rose-Ann changed back suddenly to her acccustomed self; and his own mood, a moment ago puzzled and angry, could not withstand the influence of her smile. Then both of them were sorry, and accused themselves inwardly of the fault. . . . Felix could see why she objected to being merely "a wife," and wondered that he had been so crass as to say such a thing . . . and they sought with passionate tenderness to make each other forget. . . .

"Do I make you happy, Felix?"

"Yes. . . . And are you happy?"

"Yes,"—a little sadly, in spite of herself.

"Sometimes," he said, "you seem for a moment to go far away from me, even when you are here in my arms. I

can't bear that." He held her more closely, as though to reassure himself of the reality of her presence. "Then it all begins to seem like a dream again. . . . I've always been lonely for you, all my life, wanting you always . . . and not believing I was ever going to find you . . . trying to adjust myself to a world in which you didn't exist. And sometimes, even now—But you are real, aren't you?"

"I dreamed of you, too, Felix. . . ."

"Isn't it strange? And strangest of all, that the story should have a happy ending."

"This—is just the beginning, Felix. . . ."

A faint sadness in her tone, that he had heard before in the very midst of their happiness, frightened him.

"The beginning, yes," he said. "The beginning of happiness."

"And—afterward, Felix?"

"More happiness. . . . Doesn't that satisfy you?"

"Yes, but—Oh, of course it's beautiful and wonderful to me, Felix. But I'm afraid. . . ."

"Of what, darling?"

"We love just being together, now. But will we always? I mean—doesn't something happen to happiness, after a while? I know it sounds absurd. I don't mean we'll fall out of love—not that—but won't we lose the beauty of this—this intimacy, in time? You know how other people sometimes seem—cooped up and used to each other—just that. It's ugly, to me . . . I suspect we are rather awful, Felix, talking about such things! . . ."

"No," he said. "It isn't enough to feel—we must know why we feel."

She sighed. "I guess we *are* like that. We can't even take happiness without asking why."

It was true; they encouraged each other in what would have seemed, to some people, an exaggerated curiosity about things of no importance—and, to many lovers, a prying into matters best left alone. Do not all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy? They did not seem to fear it.

"I suppose," said Felix reflectively, "people must care a

great deal for each other. . . . It would be dreadful, this closeness, if one didn't want it."

"But does one keep on wanting it? . . . Yes, Felix, that's what I'm afraid of. If this is only for a while—and then we were to be just like other people—sunk in a greasy domesticity—Felix, I couldn't keep on living,"

He took her hand tenderly. "But we aren't like those other people, Rose-Ann," he said. He had a baffling sense of this speech contradicting something he had said or thought before. . . .

"Do you really think our marriage is so different from other people's, Felix?"

They seemed to have exchanged places in the argument—that argument, so absurd and yet so poignant, which kept arising, neither of them knowing why, nor quite what it was all about. . . .

"Of course our marriage is different," he was saying. "How many married people really want to know each other? How many of them can really talk to one another about what is going on in their inmost minds—as we do!"

"Yes, we do, don't we," said Rose-Ann, comforted to find in this complete candour of theirs an authentic superiority to the common destiny of tragic and ridiculous mutual misunderstanding.

"We shall always be finding out new things about one another," Felix went on bravely. "That is what our marriage means—a knitting together of our whole lives, a marrying of our memories."

"And our hopes, too, Felix," said Rose-Ann. "And a creating of something new and beautiful—books, plays, poems. . . . But I forgot!" she laughed. "I mustn't talk about your literary works till you let me. Must talk about something else! . . .

"Yes, Felix, we *are* different. We can say things to each other that ordinary lovers couldn't. I wouldn't have dared speak of my silly fears to anybody but you. . . . And—you can tell me things. . . . What you wrote to me, when I was home in Springfield, you remember, about that girl, Felix—

I loved you for it. A sonnet you read me last night reminded me of her and you. I made you read it over twice—I didn't tell you why. I still remember the way it begins." Softly she said the lines:

"We needs must know that in the days to come
No child, that from our summer sprang, shall be. . . .

"It made me love you all the more to know you felt so about your boyish love-affair—that you wanted to be married, that you really wanted your girl-sweetheart to have a baby, hers and yours. . . . I'm glad it didn't happen that way, but I think you were a lovely, foolish, beautiful boy-lover to want it. . . .

"Of course," she added, "artists shouldn't have families to support. . . . They are children themselves.—Do you know why I want to get a job, Felix? You mustn't be angry at me—but if anything should happen, if you should lose your place on the Chonicle, or if you should get to feel that you need all your time for your writing, I would want to be able to make enough money so you could go on with your own work. You don't mind my wanting that, do you, Felix? We're not the conventional married couple, the wife sitting at home doing nothing while the man goes out to work every day! I want to be a real helpmeet—an artist's wife, not an ordinary wife."

"You're a darling," said Felix. "But—" a little uncomfortably—"I guess I can take care of myself; I shan't need to be supported. Why don't you go ahead and be an artist yourself?"

"Oh, Felix, I can't! . . ."

"Why not? What kind of artist do you want to be?"

"Something I can't be, Felix. If I tell you, you'll understand. . . . But you won't laugh at me?"

"Of course not, Rose-Ann."

"But it's really funny! Especially if you had seen me when I was a girl—shy, awkward, prudish—yes, prudish, Felix. When I was eighteen, I was the worst little old maid you ever saw. I read romantic books all the time, and real people seemed to me coarse and horrible. I hated

everybody. I wouldn't go to boy-and-girl parties, because of the—it still seems an ugly word to me—'spooning' that went on in the corners. I wouldn't dance, I wouldn't hold hands. I wouldn't keep company. Oh, I was terrible. For a while I wanted to be a missionary in some savage country—"

"And teach the natives to wear clothes?—is that your secret ambition?" he laughed.

"No—for I got converted . . . to paganism. When I was twenty-one years old. It was a book that converted me."

"I really know very little about you, don't I? All this seems so strange. . . . I've imagined you as always being what you are now. What book was it converted you?"

"It was 'Leaves of Grass.' You remember I told you how I decided to be a librarian, and took a course of training, and was made an assistant in the library at Springfield. . . . Well, there was a shelf of forbidden books—and one day I opened one of those forbidden books, and read a passage. . . I'll tell you: it was 'A woman's body at auction'—do you remember it? Uncouth, wonderful lines—not so much poetry to me as a revelation. I remember I stood there reading some of those lines again and again, and I went back to the desk saying them over and over to myself—just rough, plain phrases naming over one by one the joints and muscles and parts of the body, like an anatomy text-book—but making me feel, as no text-book had ever done, that these wonderful things were *my* body! Those lines still have a thrill for me—" And she chanted, solemnly, like a litany:

"Upper arm, armpit, elbow-socket, lower-arm, arm-sinews, arm-bones,
Wrist and wrist-joints, hand, palm, knuckles, forefinger, finger-joints, finger-nails,
Ribs, belly, back-bone, hips, hip-sockets. . . .
O I say these are not parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul!"

She paused, and smoked her cigarette silently, remembering. "I went around the rest of that day," she said

presently, "in a dreaming ecstasy. . . . I had read in some of my father's books about the mystics, and I knew that I felt like them when they had seen God. . . . I looked every now and then with a kind of awe at my wrist or my finger-nail, saying to myself, *These are not parts of the body only, but of the soul!* And that night I took the book home, and read it in bed, happy and afraid. . . .

"And now comes the part that is funny. There always is something funny, isn't there, in trying to put a revelation into practice! But don't laugh at me, Felix. Think what it would mean to a young-lady-librarian, a clergyman's daughter, to discover that her body was a poem. . . . I got out of bed and took off my nightgown to look at myself in the glass. But it was a modest glass, fastened sideways to the top of the bureau, and it refused to show me all of myself at once; so I unfastened it, and wrestled it down from the bureau, and stood it upright against the wall. I was rather disappointed, Felix—my body wasn't as beautiful as a poem ought to be; it was just a slim, awkward, twenty-one-year-old girl's body, that was all.

"But there *had* been something beautiful about it for a moment—in the glimpses I had of it in the glass as I pulled it down from the bureau; then it had been—well, yes, beautiful, with the beauty of—flexed muscles and purposeful movement. . . . And I had a kind of vision. . . . Yes, really, Felix . . . a wonderful and terrible moment, in which I seemed to see myself wrestling with life, in a kind of agony of creation . . . and for a moment I seemed to know what my woman's body was for. And then I sort of waked up, wondering what it was all about. I was thrilled and afraid. . . .

"And then an idea came to me—I'm glad I can tell you this part, Felix—I said to myself: I will be a dancer! Yes, I decided to go to Chicago and learn to be a dancer. . . .

"There was a boy who wanted to marry me—though I don't know what this has to do with it; anyway, I would get away from him at the same time, by going to Chicago. . . . I was all on fire with the idea. I wanted to start right

away with dancing. I couldn't go to sleep. And—this is the part that seems to me the most terribly ridiculous of all—I went downstairs and brought back the Dan-Emp volume of father's encyclopedia to read the article about Dancing. . . .

"And there, in that article, Felix, I learned why I could never be a really-truly dancer—it seems that one must begin in one's cradle!

"Well—I cried. I could cry now when I think about it. I'm a perfect fool, Felix. . . . But what's the use of having a vision of one's purpose in life, if one can't do anything about it? . . . There seemed to be nothing to do except stay in Springfield and—marry that boy. And I couldn't, I couldn't do that. I thought of other things besides dancing that I might do, but they didn't interest me. An artist's model? Somehow I didn't like that idea—not in modern terms—not at so much an hour; after all, I *was* a clergyman's daughter, and it just didn't seem respectable! I thought—if I had lived in Ancient Greece, I might have been a friend of Phidias or somebody, and seen myself carved upon the frieze of a temple . . . or been one of the marble maidens of Keats' Grecian Urn. Oh, I dreamed of all the lovely and impossible things in the world. And I decided—at least I wouldn't stay in Springfield!"

"And so you came to Chicago. . . . "

"Yes, and became a settlement-worker. It seems a pitiful climax to my story, doesn't it? And yet, if one lives in twentieth-century America instead of in Ancient Greece, what is one to do? It seemed to me a good pagan life, to try to bring about a better world for everybody—a world in which beauty would count for something. . . . At one time I thought I was a socialist, but I found that I couldn't bear to attend stuffy meetings, and that I couldn't understand Marx and didn't want to. And I wasn't interested in woman suffrage, either. My life had to be centred around something personal. So—"

"So you taught those children how to play. . . . "

"It was the Greekliest thing I knew to do. . . . If Aspasia

had been born in Springfield, Illinois, *she* might have taken a class in a Chicago settlement!" Rose-Ann said defiantly—and then, doubtfully, "What do you think of it all?"

"I don't know," he said—"it leaves me bewildered—except that I think you're a wonderful child."

"It's you who are wonderful," she said, "to understand. I *am* a child, I suppose—and I want to stay one always. I don't want to grow up. That's very foolish, isn't it? Do you know that horrible habit some married people have of addressing each other as 'Pa' and 'Ma' —as soon as they have a baby, I mean? I suppose it's meant as a joke. And I suppose it's a joke, too, when a man refers to his wife as 'the old woman.' When I was a little girl, I vowed to myself that no man would ever have the right to call me his 'old woman.' Or . . . but then, we shan't ever have any children, shall we? You remember what I said—the talk we had in the hospital that day. I meant that, Felix."

Felix's mind was fumbling for the lost thread of their discourse. Rose-Ann's talk had a disconcerting way of suddenly leaping from one idea to another. How did they come to be talking about children? She had brought them in, without rhyme or reason, more than once tonight. And each time he had remembered with a sense of discouragement and vague shame that moment at the hospital when he had not had the courage to tell her that he wanted to be—everything that it seemed he need not be after all. He wanted now to say something—but what could he say? Some other time, perhaps, when he had a chance to think things out more clearly. . . . It did not need to be settled now.

"Why," he said confusedly, "we did talk about it, yes. I don't suppose we can afford to—" He was going to add "right away," but Rose-Ann interrupted him.

"Oh, dear!" she said, "I've forgotten—I promised to let my father know our address, as soon as we found a place to live, so he could come and see us, and I forgot all about it! Felix, will you bring me pencil and paper, please? I'll write to him now."

Rose-Ann's troubled mind—too troubled to be aware of itself—had been seeking an answer to a question . . . the question for which she had unconsciously sought the answer in "Leaves of Grass," in the "Dan-Emp" volume of her father's encyclopedia, in settlement work, and now in her marriage. There was an answer which she dreaded—and perhaps hoped—to hear. But in his chance phrase she had heard instead the definite ratification of their casual agreement that she was never to bear him a child . . . and the question, which neither of them knew had been discussed, of whether the meaning of her vision, of her search, of her unsatisfied yearning, might not perhaps be found in the common, ordinary, the all too obvious rôle of motherhood, was answered No. . . .

Felix brought the pencil and a writing pad, and she sat and wrote, and smiled, and wrote again. She had become once more remote—a figure, it seemed to him as she sat there on the bed in the lamplight with her red-gold hair falling over her white shoulders, like a girl in a painting, as eternally lovely and unapproachable.

She stopped writing. "We've utterly forgotten the world ever since we moved into this studio," she murmured.

"And a good thing, too," said Felix, feeling in her words some threat against their peace and quiet.

"But we *must* let our friends know where we are—and that they can come to see us. . . . We might give a kind of house-warming."

"A house-warming?" Felix repeated doubtfully.

"Yes—a big party—one of the kind you hate. But I'll make it up to you by giving some cozy little parties. . . . There are people you ought to know, Felix. . . . Yes, I'm going to be a real artist's wife!" She put her arms about him and kissed him, fiercely and tenderly.

XXVII. Parties

I

ROSE-ANN decided to give at least one or two of her "little" parties immediately; perhaps to encourage Felix to meet the larger ordeal. And to the first of these little parties, she planned to invite, with what seemed to Felix a reckless defiance of congruity, Clive, Dorothy Sheridan (who had in the meantime been in to see "what they had done to her old studio" and appeared to be satisfied that they had *not* turned it into what she called "a Christian home") —and the Howard Morgans!

A more ill-assorted company, Felix felt, had never been invited to sit at the one table—a poet who was also (or at least so Felix considered him) a social lion, a rough-mannered Bohemian girl-artist, a satirical young newspaper writer; and he, a frightened young husband giving his first dinner, was doubtless expected by his infatuated bride to bring music out of this discord! Well, let her find out. . . . It was a relief, anyway, to be told that he need not wear his evening clothes.

The party went off amazingly well. There was a certain constraint, at first, it was true; but it was not of the sort he had expected. Dorothy Sheridan had turned up with her bobbed hair elaborately and beautifully curled and wearing a gaily embroidered Russian smock. "I never wear smocks when I paint," she said, "painters never do—but I like to wear them everywhere else. What kind of folks are these Morgans?" And being told by Rose-Ann—rashly, Felix thought—that they were "all right," she said, "Then I can smoke," and lighted a cigarette with an air of relief. . . And when the Howard Morgans came, the great man was dressed in an old suit of corduroys, concerning which he

appeared to be nervous. He looked at Felix's clothes anxiously, and then at Dorothy Sheridan with her cigarette, and seemed reassured. He must have been reassured, for when the introductions were accomplished, he took out an old sack of tobacco from his coat-pocket and a crumpled package of straw-colored paper, and rolled himself a cigarette. . . . Yes, that was all they were afraid of—that the occasion might not be sufficiently informal! And after they had ceased to be afraid of that, they got on vastly well, drank Felix's cocktails with gusto, ate Rose-Ann's dinner (it was, though one might not have known it, a delicatessen dinner) with unabashed appetite, and talked like old friends. Later in the evening, Clive turned to Dorothy Sheridan and demanded, "Come, you are not really one of *the* Sheridans, are you? I can't believe it!"—And she answered: "Well, I'm the black sheep of the family; I don't live their life—I paint, and mind my own business—so you ought not to hold that against me!" From her manner, one would have thought that the Sheridans were a band of notorious criminals, but Rose-Ann told him afterward—what it seemed she had suspected all along—that Dorothy belonged to one of the—well, as Clive had said, one of *"the"*—families of Chicago. . . . Yes, they got along very well indeed, and Felix talked about everything in the world with complete unselfconsciousness. . . .

2

Yes, that party was all right. . . . But a dinner for Will Blake of Community House, *and* Paul, their old scenic-genius friend, now a prosperous designer of musical comedy settings in New York and just back in Chicago for a few days—*and* (yes!) old Mrs. Perk . . . that was simply, Felix felt, defying the gods. And yet it turned out to be an even more successful party than the other. Mrs. Perk was as delightful a dinner companion as any one could wish, and really made the party a "go." . . . Or perhaps it was the studio: apparently everybody liked a touch of bohemia; apparently anybody in such a place could be com-

pletely human, natural, and at ease. . . . Or perhaps it was Rose-Ann: there was no doubt about it, she was a wonderful hostess. . . .

And Rose-Ann had only just started, it seemed, on her social career. After the "house-warming," which came next on their program, she intended to ask some of her "bourgeois" friends in to dinner, before they went away for the summer. "You haven't been miserable at *these* parties, have you?" she said. "Well, you'll find the others just as easy. Everybody's human—even in evening clothes, Felix. We'll have to go to dinner at these other people's houses, too, you know—and once you make up your mind to it, you can have as good a time there as you can here!"

All right. . . . He would try to enjoy himself, he promised obediently. But this house-warming presented difficulties. They were inviting everybody they knew—everybody!—people from Community House, from the Chronicle office, from Canal street, et cetera. . . . Such a crowd! "I shall have to introduce them to each other, and I won't remember their names," he said forlornly. "I never remember people's names!"

"It's all right!" said Rose-Ann. "After a cocktail or two, half of them won't know their own names. Besides, this will be our last big party, ever. I promise!"

Well, it was a satisfaction to know that. But—cocktails, and Community House residents; Felix was not sure (even after seeing Will Blake flushed and merry with their California wine sherbert the other night!) how these two elements would mix. Eddie Silver after his ninth cocktail would scarcely be an edifying spectacle. "Don't worry," said Rose-Ann. "People are not so Puritanical as you think. Anyway, our respectable friends will come early and go early—and the others vice-versa."

"I thought," said Felix, "when I went to the hospital, that I had finished with boozing . . ."

"So you have," said Rose-Ann cheerfully. "This is quite different!"

"And you a clergyman's daughter!" said Felix.

3

Rose-Ann's father was somewhat on Felix's mind, because she had said he might come to see them any day. And if Felix felt some awkwardness in adapting himself to the convivial life, he felt still more embarrassment at the prospect of acting the difficult rôle of the son-in-law of a clergyman. . . . One had to, it seemed, be so many different things to get along with people! But he was learning. When these parties were over, he would commence to think about how to make himself agreeable to his father-in-law.

And then, late in the afternoon of the day of the housewarming, when Rose-Ann had gone out to buy something she had forgotten, and Felix was busy squeezing lemons, a tall, gentle, stooping man with a slight greying beard walked into the studio, looked about, smiled, and extended his hand.

"I suppose you are my son-in-law," he said. "I see you're getting ready for a party, so I'm just in time. Rose-Ann didn't specially invite me, but I guess she'll let her old dad come anyway."

XXVIII. A Father-in-Law

I

FELIX stood still for a moment with a lemon suspended in mid-squeeze.

"I know just how you feel," said the old gentleman. "At such a moment as this, a father-in-law would be just the last straw!"

Felix laughed, and shook the extended hand. "Did I give away my dismay as plainly as all that?" he asked.

"I don't blame you," said the old gentleman, taking off his hat and overcoat, and sitting down. "Go right on with what you were doing, and we'll talk. I feel rather well acquainted with you from what I've already heard about you. No, Rose-Ann didn't say much, but I sort of always know what she's up to. The marriage wasn't exactly a surprise to me. And I shouldn't have thought of coming down here to bother you, except that I thought it would be better for me to come than one of the boys. You see, I'll have to report to them that it's all right, or they'll go on thinking that Rose-Ann has married some perfectly disreputable person." He smiled.

"How do you know," Felix asked, laughingly, "that I'm *not* a disreputable person!"

"Well," said Rose-Ann's father gravely, taking out a cigar, "perhaps you are. Will you have one of these? No? They're very good Havana cigars—I can recommend them; oh, I see you smoke cigarettes. . . . Perhaps you *are* a disreputable person. But of a certain type that I can very well sympathize with, because I belong to it myself. Impractical. Yes, I can see you're that. Not interested in making money. All that sort of thing. Yes, I'm afraid my sons would consider you a poor match for Rose-Ann. What they don't understand is that she was bound to marry that

sort if she married anybody. I'll have to misrepresent you when I get back home. I'll tell them that you're an enterprising young newspaper man. You won't mind that?"

"I should be delighted to have somebody think that of me," said Felix.

"Well, there's no reason why they shouldn't. . . . I'll be a little sad when I get home, and tell them that I'm afraid Rose-Ann will never be really happy with you—that you are too practical to appreciate the poetic side of her nature. Then they'll be convincd that it's all right. . . . I suppose it sounds odd to you, my speaking this way of my own sons?"

"Well—yes," said Felix, "it does rather! But it's refreshing."

"I haven't a scrap of family sentiment," said Rose-Ann's father. "I am interested in people only as individuals. And I must say that I have been cursed with four of the most practical and unimaginative sons that a ne'er-do-well father ever had. They will all end up as millionaires, I'm sure. By the way, I hope you've no prejudice against preachers?"

"Not your kind, anyway!" Felix laughed.

"I was reading a book the other day," said the old man, "about women in the Middle Ages. It said that women often went into convents then, not because they felt particularly religious, but because they wanted to escape from the humdrum ways of ordinary life. A woman who went into a convent might become—a scholar, a ruler, a politician, the peer of princes! She could have friendships with distinguished men. She could be, in a sense that her married sister wasn't, free. . . . And I thought how well all that applied to myself. If I had lived in a Catholic country, I would probably have gone into a monastery, and written a history of something. I did the next best thing, it seems to me now. I went into a profession where nobody is expected to succeed. I escaped from the bedevilment of business; I started out in business, you know, and left it for the ministry. Now I can be a little odd, and nobody minds very much. I am very fortunate, I think. The pulpit is a wonderful refuge. For instance—do you like to drink?"

"No—not really," Felix said.

"No, I thought not," said the old gentleman. "But you have to. You will have to consume your share of that enormous quantity of vile-tasting medicine you are preparing for your guests. Now, I am free from any such social necessity. It's an enormous relief."

Felix thought of his Eddie Silver parties in the past, and all the parties he seemed committed to in the future—and it seemed to him that Rose-Ann's father was indeed very fortunate.

"I assume," said the old man, "that you don't particularly relish the idea of this party, anyway?"

"No, to tell the truth, I don't," said Felix.

"Of course not. What sane human being would want to spend an evening talking to forty people without saying anything to any of them? And yet ordinary people are supposed to like that sort of thing."

"Rose-Ann promises that this will be the last one of this kind."

"Hold her to her promise, young man!" said Rose-Ann's father. "And be stern about it. Be ruthless. Rose-Ann," he observed reflectively, "means well. But after all, she's a woman. And when you know as much about women as I do, you will know that they are the natural ally of the world against the human soul. Now I have always had my *sermon* as an excuse for getting out of everything I didn't want to do. I always managed to make the writing of that sermon last me nearly all week. I locked myself in my study, and let the world rush past outside. In my study I could read and dream and think; I could be by myself. Aren't you going to write a novel or something? A play, I believe it was Rose-Ann spoke of."

"I'm—thinking about something of the sort," said Felix. It was true, he reflected, he had not been able to get any writing done lately! One could not write with parties going on all the time. . . .

"Well, you'd better get down to work on it right away. And get a room of your own somewhere to do it in. You're

just married, and your head is full of all sorts of romantic nonsense about Rose-Ann, who is a very fine young woman, but, after all, a woman; and the time to establish your right to be by yourself some of the time is at the very beginning. I see you have two desks up there in front. Do you expect to work there?"

"Yes. That one is Rose-Ann's—"

"And the other is yours. And when you are in the middle of a sentence, you find that Rose-Ann has come over and put her arms around your neck. Very natural. Very charming. But how in the name of Prince Beelzebub are you going to get any work done under those circumstances?"

Felix smiled. It certainly was odd, to have one's wife's father take your side against her. But it was easy to see that he was thinking of his own case. He had doubtless had to lock himself in his study to be free from the encroachments of domesticity. But Rose-Ann was different; Rose-Ann did not come over and kiss him in the middle of a sentence. . . .

"I see you don't take my warnings seriously," said the old man. "Well, don't say I didn't do my best for you. Here she is now."

Rose-Ann came in, crying out, "Dad!"—and running up to him flung her arms about him. "You didn't tell me you were coming!"

Her father set her on his knees.

"No, Rosie, I didn't—and I see I've intruded on a wild party. But if you'll not tell anybody I'm a preacher they won't know it. I won't spoil your party!"

"It's only our house-warming, and of *course* I'm glad you came. How do you like my husband?" She looked proudly at Felix.

"We've become very well acquainted," said her father. "I've been warning him against you."

"And you've been getting cigar-ashes all over my nice clean floor, too," said Rose-Ann. "Why will you never, never learn to use an ash-tray?"

"I'm sorry, my dear," said her father with a twinkle at

Felix, "but I thought this was a studio, and that people in studios did just as they pleased."

"Well," said Rose-Ann, "if you're not going to be a preacher tonight, you can help Felix get things ready for the cocktails. I have a million sandwiches to fix, myself. Take off your coat and put on this apron. How do you like our studio?"

"I was very much impressed by those desks up in the front there," he said disingenuously, smiling at Felix.

"Yes, that's where Felix is going to write his play, and I'm going to do—I don't know just what, yet. But isn't it all—wonderful, father!"

"Wonderful!" said Rose-Ann's father.

2

Whether it was the effect of that talk or not, all Felix's recent social sophistication had vanished utterly, and the party passed after the usual fashion of such events to a shy and bewildered person. He made desperate efforts to remember people's names, and succeeded once or twice; at other times Rose-Ann intervened and performed that painful feat for him; and once when he saw two people beside him who had not yet been introduced, and whose names he knew as well as he knew his own, but which he could not to save his life think of, he slunk away in guilty crimson shame. An old lady—it seemed to him that he was a favourite prey of old ladies—got him into a corner and talked to him for a long time about telepathy, and the life beyond the grave. He could not recall ever having seen her before, and he wondered what she was doing at his house-warming. "Yes," he said earnestly to her—"yes!" So convincingly, that Rose-Ann, who wanted him to meet Professor Hedding of the University of Chicago, left him alone until at last she caught his piteous glance of appeal and came and bore him away. Howard Morgan was there, at ease as always, his leonine grey head the centre of a phantasmagoria which he seemed to understand, to rule with a glance, a smile, a word. He was enjoying it all.

"No," Felix said to himself, "I shall never be like that!"

His father-in-law wandered up to him as he stood helplessly aside. He seemed to Felix to be about to ask, "And is this the kind of life you are going to lead?" But instead, he remarked, "Your friend Mr. Bangs is a very interesting young man. We had a good talk. I like the way his mind works."

It struck Felix as the oddest aspect of his fantastic fortunes that he should have a father-in-law—out of all possible fathers-in-law!—who so heartily approved of him, approved of his very weakness, and of his maddest friends! What he might have expected was: "If I were you, I don't think I'd see too much of that young man—he has queer ideas." But queer ideas, his own and Clive's, were, it seemed, not merely tolerable, but commendable. . . .

A little before midnight, the Rev. Mr. Prentiss took his daughter and son-in-law aside and said, "I'm getting sleepy, so I'm going to my train and try to get a little sleep between now and morning. No, don't you bother about seeing me off. But you must come and visit us in Springfield. Sometime, I mean—no hurry—just whenever you feel like it." He shook hands with Felix. "Do," he said. Rose-Ann kissed him, and he slipped quietly away.

"Father likes you," she whispered.

"He's lovely," said Felix.

"He told me—"

"What?"

"Never mind. I'll tell you some other time."

"What?" Felix repeated.

"Oh, I guess the same things he told you. He warned you against me. And he warned me, too."

"Against *me*?"

"No. Against myself. Come, we must say good-bye to these people."

XXIX. Interlude at Midnight

1

CLIVE stayed a few minutes after the others to give them some news. Phyllis, it seemed, was desperately discontented with the process of learning to be a teacher. And he had been talking with Howard Morgan about her—Howard Morgan had spent a summer in Woods Point, and remembered her as "the pretty girl who used to drive a taxi"—and he had become interested in her problem to the extent of offering her a position as his secretary ("if she can type manuscripts, and look up things in books"—he was at work now on a grandiose historical poem). That, Clive had remarked, seemed to solve the problem of coming to Chicago for her—if she accepted it. He wanted to know what they thought about it.

Rose-Ann had said, a little wearily, that that did seem to solve the problem for her.

"So you're in favour of it?" Clive had asked, insistently.

Rose-Ann had shrugged her shoulders. "It's not for me to decide!" she said, and so Clive, thanking her in an ironical voice, had gone away.

2

And as soon as he had gone Felix began—or thought he began—to understand what it was all about. . . . And yet, the fancy was so preposterous!

"I wonder," he said cautiously, "why Clive made such a fuss about that offer of Howard Morgan's?"

"Well," said Rose-Ann. "Leave the door open a moment to let the smoke out. . . ."

"What kind of reputation has Howard Morgan, with—with regard to girls?" he asked point-blank.

"Oh," said Rose-Ann, "the usual reputation of handsome poets, old and young. Why?"

"Then," said Felix, "—then that was what Clive was thinking about!"

"I suppose so," said Rose-Ann. "I think the room's aired out now. You can close the door."

"But," said Felix, "It's monstrous!"

"What—oh, you're still talking about Phyllis? But why be angry at *me* about it?"

"I'm not angry at you, Rose-Ann; I'm disgusted with Clive for thinking of turning her over to that old scoundrel! . . . You don't seem to care?"

"Must everybody in the world be sorry for poor Phyllis, and anxious about poor Phyllis, and worrying about poor Phyllis?" Rose-Ann demanded in a tone of exasperation. "I'm tired of her problems, myself. Can't she decide what she wants to do without so much masculine assistance? After all, all I said was that it wasn't my affair. Let her decide for herself. . . . And shut the door, please—it's getting chilly. . . . "

Felix shut the door.

"Well, this is over, anyway!" said Rose-Ann, walking back behind the screen, and kicking off her pumps.

Felix followed her. "What's over?"

"This party," she said, letting down her hair. "A lot of cleaning tomorrow, and then—never again. . . . Felix, I don't want you to be a perfect host, after all. You don't have to be anything you don't want to be."

"But about Phyllis," he said. "Surely you aren't cold-bloodedly considering her becoming the mistress of that old—"

"Poets don't have mistresses nowadays," said Rose-Ann, impersonally, "at least, in Chicago. They have flirtations—and 'affairs.' An 'affair' may mean anything. Howard Morgan has been having 'affairs' for the last forty years. I was surprised that he didn't have some pretty girl sitting on his lap tonight. He does it in such a fatherly way that

nobody can object, not even his wife. After all, I repeat, it's Phyllis's concern, not mine."

"You mean that she might be agreeable to such an arrangement?" Felix asked angrily.

"How do I know?" she said. "Put out the candle, will you, Felix?"

"I can't understand you!" he said. "I thought you liked her?"

"I do," she said. "At least, I'm willing to let her live her own life as she sees fit."

"I'm not," said Felix, blindly.

"No," said Rose-Ann. "Of course you're not. You want to save her from 'that old scoundrel.' But I don't see how you can do it, Felix, except by divorcing me, and marrying her yourself. And just because you're jealous of Howard Morgan—"

"Jealous! Rose-Ann!"

"—Is no reason for quarrelling with me. . . . "

"I'm not quarrelling with you, Rose-Ann. But I think you are trying to quarrel with me. You behave as though *you* were jealous, yourself." The idea had seemed absurd, until he stated it; then he looked at her wonderingly. "Perhaps you are!"

"Perhaps I am, Felix. But I wish you wouldn't stalk up and down while you're talking to me. Of course I'm jealous, Felix."

"What in the world of?"

"Of Phyllis. . . . Oh, I know I'm not being reasonable, Felix. But I'm tired, and I've been scolded by my father, and made to feel like—like a wife. I suppose that's why I'm behaving like one. And—and—damn it all, I'm going to cry." And she did.

XXX. Fathers and Daughters

I

FELIX, astonished and perturbed, came over and petted her. "What's the matter, darling?" he asked.

"Oh, Felix," she said, putting her head against his breast, "do you love me?"

"Of course I love you! Don't you know it?"

"I suppose so. But—all this—I've felt separated from you. I've felt—I don't know what—I suppose it was what my father said—that this was just going to be him and my mother all over again. . . ."

"He said that!"

"No, that isn't what he said. But that's what it made me feel. Felix, we aren't going to stop loving one another now, are we?"

"Of course not. But what was it your father did say?"

"Nothing—only he spoke of how many distinguished friends we had, and—I knew he meant it all satirically—and that you had the makings of a successful man in you, if they were properly brought out by an ambitious wife—meaning me. And I felt as though—as though— Felix, I don't want to behave to you as my mother did to my father. . . ."

"What do you mean?" he asked quietly, still petting her like a child.

"You know, they were married very young, and he gave up business for the ministry after they were married, and we were very poor until my brothers left school and commenced to make money—and I think she never forgave him for that. And I've always—"

"Can't we live our own life and love, Rose-Ann, without

letting it get mixed up with our fathers and mothers?" Felix asked sadly.

Rose-Ann rubbed from her face the last vestige of her tears. "That's why I didn't want father to come to see us," she said. "In-laws always mess things up, don't they?"

"Even when they are the nicest people in the world, like your father."

"Felix—I'm so glad to be back with you again—I feel as though I had been away from you, somehow. I don't like it."

"Don't go away again, Rose-Ann-dear."

"I won't." She pressed her head closer against his breast. "I'll never go away again."

Again the storm had passed, leaving Felix again wondering how it could have arisen. Some of the things they had said to each other were really incredible. How hard and hostile they had been to each other! And—quarrelling over Phyllis! Why, the whole thing was absurd, the product of fevered imaginations. . . . Why had they both been so willing to indulge those grotesque fantasies about Phyllis and Howard Morgan? . . . And then, what of Rose-Ann's freakish accusation against him—for that was what it amounted to!—of being in love with Phyllis? Phyllis, whom he had seen but once in his life, and that on the occasion of his own marriage! Had Rose-Ann really been jealous? It was too extravagantly farcical.

But oughtn't they discuss these things, and settle them, once and for all? Wasn't that what their mutual candour was for, to expose and kill these silly doubts and fears and suspicions? Or—did talking about such things only give them new vitality? Were these things too senseless to talk about?

"I love you, Felix."

"I love you, Rose-Ann."

There was a true magic, it seemed, in words like those! They brought happiness . . . and forgetfulness. . . .

"Darling. . . ."

"Yes. . . ."

"Did we have a quarrel?"
"I don't know—did we?"
"Yes—but what was it about?"
"I can't remember!"
"Neither can I!"
They laughed happily at their folly.

2

Yet Felix could not quite understand the turn of affairs which followed the brief and dynamic intrusion of Rose-Ann's father into their domestic life. Rose-Ann had changed. The most obvious manifestation of that change was the complete abandonment of all her social plans.

She had intended to give a number of parties to her "bourgeois friends" that spring; but they were never given; and when Felix asked why, she only shook her head and said,

"You know you don't like parties, Felix."

Felix was quite aware that he did not like parties. But he had definitely assessed that dislike as a species of cowardice, which he must get over. Just because he did not like parties was the very reason why he should try to learn to like them. Other people liked parties; and he wanted to become as other people are. He had surrendered himself to Rose-Ann's guidance. He trusted her as a mentor. He had worn evening clothes, learned to carve and serve a roast of beef, talked desperately about nothing to people whose names he could not remember, because she wanted him to. He had braced himself to endure the worst that the social life had to offer; he would do whatever she demanded. And now suddenly she had ceased to demand anything! There was a tremendous relief in this relaxation; but it left him puzzled and brooding.

"I understood," he said to her hesitatingly one day, "that you had undertaken to civilize me. Have you given up the task as hopeless?"

"But I don't want to civilize you, Felix!" she protested.

"I thought you did want to," he said.

"I'm sorry you thought that," she said.

"Then what," he insisted, "do you want me to be, if not civilized?"

"An artist," she said.

He laughed. "That is too easy," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking at him with incredulous wide-open eyes and parted lips.

"Rose-Ann, I've always been an artist. That's the trouble with me. I don't say I've been a good artist. I've nothing to show for my art-ing except a barrelful of youthful poems, an unfinished novel that I burned up before I came to Chicago, and a few fantastic fragments of impossible plays. But I've been an artist all the same, and I'll tell you why I'm sure of it. There are two kinds of people in the world—artists and human beings. I've never been a human being; so I must have been an artist. And I don't want to be any longer!"

She looked at him, frightened at this heresy.

"But Felix!" she said.

"And I thought you were going to help me," he said.

"To stop being an artist?" she cried, starting up as though a dreadful accusation had been flung at her.

"To be a human being," he said, laughingly.

She looked at him with eyes of alarm.

"I can't think you mean it!" she said.

"Perhaps I don't. . . . It's hard to tell what one really does mean," he said, discouraged. "I don't mean that I shan't keep on trying to write plays—if that's what you are afraid of."

"I'm not afraid," she said. "Only, Felix—"

"Yes?"

"You must do what *you* want to do; not what you think I want you to do!"

"Why do you say that?" he asked; for it sounded cryptic, as if charged with hidden meanings.

"Because," she said, "I think we've been going on a wrong basis. I've—done things to you I didn't intend. I'm sorry. . . . And from now on I'm going to—let you alone."

He laughed. "All right!" he said.

3

He thought he knew what she meant. Not in vain had dozens of novels been written in which the young wife subtly corrupts her artist husband into prosperous mediocrity. So that was what Rose-Ann was afraid of! She did not know that the artist chooses his wife in the profound unconscious hope of being led down from the perilous icy heights of lonely poetic ecstasy into the green valleys of everyday human life. . . .

That Rose-Ann wanted him to dwell with her here in these green valleys he did not doubt. She wanted him to be successful. But she did not want to be blamed for his success!

He could understand that.

Well, he would take the responsibility upon himself.

He would become what, in her secret heart, and in spite of all her protestations, she really wanted him to be.

XXXI. More or Less Theatrical

I

MEANWHILE, with summer coming on, Felix had wondered what an assistant dramatic editor would find to do. He learned from Hawkins that the management traditionally continued the Saturday dramatic department through the season, though in a restricted space. Later, in anticipation of the opening of the theatrical season, he could print the news of what New York and London held in prospect for the Chicago public. And for the present a column or two once a week could be furbished up somehow —the how of it being left entirely to Felix's own discretion and ingenuity.

"Interviews—clip-stuff from the London weeklies of last winter—anything to keep going," said Hawkins, cleaning up his desk and going home on a formal leave of absence for the summer to rewrite his play—which, it appeared, had impressed a New York manager and only needed to be "strengthened" in its second act.

Felix, according to his arrangement with Willie Smith, was to write "something light," every day if possible, for the editorial page; and that done, nobody cared what he put in the Saturday "Plays and Acting" column. With Hawkins away, he felt that he had a free hand. And the fact that there were no new plays to criticize did not matter much, for the kind of criticism that Felix liked to write subsisted quite as well on familiar plays that everybody had seen as upon brand-new ones—better, perhaps.

Felix was rather humble about the kind of dramatic criticism he wrote; though that humility merely concealed, from himself and others, a fierce egotistic pride. For his attitude toward plays was different from that of any other

dramatic critic whose work he had ever seen. It was, in a sense, not a "critical" attitude at all. Perhaps that was why his commentaries had been so well received, by the management and the readers of the Chronicle. It was at least an agreeable novelty. But Felix knew quite well that he did not have either the experience or the knowledge necessary to do the job in the usual way. Truth to tell, he both stood in awe of, and despised, the usual way. . . . The regular critics were always telling you whether a play was good or bad, and why, and assessing expertly the merits of various bits of acting. Old Jennison, "the dean," as he was sometimes called, "of the critical fraternity," could remember the way Somebody had played Hamlet, and how Miss Somebody Else had done the "great scene" in "Camille," and he told you all about it apropos of the latest play. This, doubtless, was real criticism, but of a kind Felix could not aspire to, for he had never seen Anybody in Anything. On the other hand, Hawkins was gravely an enthusiast for modernity, as represented by Ibsen and Shaw, and took occasion to point out the duty of American drama to bestir itself and deal with the problems of the time. Then, of course, there was a third kind of criticism, for which Felix had little respect—the enthusiastic pounding of drums outside the tent of some favourite actor or actress. And there was a fourth kind, for which Felix had no respect at all, but to which he sometimes feared his own work belonged—the smart-aleck kind of criticism.

He confessedly did not know very much about the art of acting, and could not even say that some part was played "in a masterly manner," let alone tell the poor devil of an actor how he should have played it. He was, as a matter of fact, not interested in the technique of acting, but only in the effects produced. And, though he was a little ashamed of it, he could not really feel that the stage had any "duties," either to modern problems or anything else. He still got a childlike thrill out of the fantasies enacted behind the footlights—at least for the first few moments after the curtain went up. And then, as that magic vanished

for him, and he became bored by the dull spectacle and unconvincing dialogue on the stage, he became interested in the audience, for whom evidently this magic still persisted. He wondered why, and tried to see the play with their eyes, to find the things in it that held them, if not breathless, at least coughless, for minutes at a time. What emotions were those that were so touched by the cheap tears and tawdry heroisms of "The Witching Hour" and "The Third Degree"? Why was it that they liked to see the heroine in distress, the hero unjustly accused? Felix set himself the task of proving that he knew why they liked these things—and he described the commonplace predicaments and familiar crises of current drama in terms which conveyed to his own mind some real emotional excitement, with only a touch or two of humorous satire as he resumed his own proper character as a philosophic observer. He found that he could translate the most absurd plot into something authentically interesting to himself—as if the worst play in the world were, after all, only a good play badly conceived. And in this mood, seeing bad plays through the eyes of an audience to whom they were interesting, he too became interested. He discovered some at least of the secrets of that wish-world of the theatre, in which what happens is what we want to happen: and, only when conscience pinches too hard, and reminds us that crime must be punished and virtue rewarded, what *ought* to happen—but not at all, no, never, a place where things happen as they do in everyday life! A strange world of pseudo-realities, elaborately persuading us at the outset that it is the same world of houses and streets as ours, inhabited by people like ourselves, wearing the same clothes and talking the same talk, ruled by the same eternal laws of probability—and then making come true for us for an hour our wildest, silliest, loveliest, most impossible dreams!

2

It was fascinating, this imaginative insight into people's minds. And—in the absence of a real play—a vaudeville

act or moving-picture or burlesque show afforded him the same, or even a more profound and startling, enlightenment.

One evening that summer he went with Rose-Ann to a burlesque theatre on South State street. He noted the people who went in—workingmen, toughs, sailors, young men wearing the latest Arrow collar, and husbands accompanied by their wives. In the street outside, the wind picked up a litter of dust and paper and flung it into people's faces. Over the roofs of tall buildings a dim moon shone in a cloudy sky. The brightest thing in this street was the arc-lighted promise of the theatre-entrance: "Refined Burlesque!"

In the front row, in an aisle seat, was a white-haired man who seemed to be nearly a hundred years old; he sat there with an air of having occupied that seat once every week since the theatre was built. Midway of the parquet floor sat a placid matron of fifty, beside her fat and complacent husband; their views on all subjects must have coincided exactly with those of Dr. Parkhurst—they were solid blocks in the fabric of our American civilization —and they had come here to find something which their life required, not to be had elsewhere. About them was a grey mass of padded masculine shoulders, with here and there, in twos and threes, girls, making spots of colour on the greyness. Above, the balcony buzzed—and the peanut-gallery filled suddenly like the breaking of a dam. An orchestra of seven filed in. And a hush, not of eagerness but of religious certainty, filled the theatre. In fifteen hundred souls there was the calm that comes of utter confidence in the absolution (or, as Aristotle would say, *katharsis!*) which they were about to receive. . . .

No one had come there for novelty; they had come for the familiar and satisfying benediction of burlesque. The old rite had changed a little with the changing times—it pretended to be a "musical comedy"—but the heart of the ancient mystery was still there. The tunes were those invented by Jubal, father of all such as handle the harp and organ—revised slightly, year by year; the first chord awoke

dim ancestral memories. There was a trace of plot on the program, and the name of an author; but no one was deceived. For, to put any doubts at rest, and to make clear that this was simply the ten millionth performance of the seasonal festival invented by Adam (after a hard day's work pulling eucalyptus stumps to the westward of Eden), it was entitled, in the good old traditional manner, "The Jolly Girls."

The orchestra played its immemorial tunes, the sons of Adam leaned a little forward with a beatific look on their faces, the curtain rose, and the festival, the sacred orgy, began. The stage was filled with Beauty, in the form of four dozen female legs, while in the right wing waited Laughter, in the shape of a little man with a putty nose. The legs burst upon the scene in a blaze of light and sound—a kaleidoscope of calf and ankle, a whirl of soft pink feminine contours, a paradisiac vision of essential Girl: the whole theatre breathed forth a sigh of happiness, and the sons of Adam leant back in their seats, content. The promise of the dionysiac god to them that toiled and bore harsh burdens, was being fulfilled.

The legs, encased in pink tights, moved forward and back, up and down. Somewhere above them were lungs and larynxes that poured forth a volume of sound, in time to the hypnotic throb of the music. Gradually, in the melée, arms became visible, and, vaguely connecting the arms and legs, pieces of colored cloth that finally became definite as golden tunics, green sashes, scarlet bodices. Moreover, there were faces—but not real faces of weariness or anger or sadness, to disturb the illusion—these faces were masks, painted to express an impersonal and disinterested pleasure in the exhibition of bodily charms. Pink cheeks, bistred eyelashed depths that emitted glances at the corners, carmined lips set in an imperishable smile—these served as the perfect and sufficient symbols of a joy that never was on sea or land.—But faces, after all, belong to another world, the world of reality; if one looks at them too long, one sees them, and the dream vanishes; so they were extinguished

presently by a row of flying legs and arms—the scene became a chaos of feminine extremities, the music rose to a climax, and stopped, as the chorus left the stage. Entered the man with the putty nose.

He spoke to somebody, in a rapid, monotonous, unintelligible voice; it did not matter, he was only telling what the plot of the piece was. His real function was revealed a minute later, when two tramps—a tall one and a short one—entered, and the tall one hit him over the head with a stick. The victim fell on his putty nose. The house rocked with laughter, and the gallery stormed applause.

What secret wish is gratified when we see man who was created in the image of God falling bump on his nose? Irresistibly, by a profound impulse, we laugh. The cares of the day, the harsh realities of life, fade away when in the golden land of Never-never a tall man enters with his short companion and hits the third man (he of the putty nose) over the head with a slapstick.

In the course of the evening, the small man was hit over the head fifty-seven hundred times; he rose but to fall again, more helplessly than before. He was also kicked—in the nose, in the ear, in front and behind. His nose was pulled into an infinite variety of shapes, being made to resemble every object under heaven from a telephone wire to a turnip. He submitted meekly, and upon him the desire of the whole audience to see mankind made ridiculous was visited times without number.

Genially, casually, the tall man kicked him in the face whenever he happened to notice him. The tall man had taken possession of the stage. Singing, dancing, clowning, guying, arguing, wheedling, mocking, bullying—now as an unshaven tramp, a few minutes later as an unshaven Turk, then as an unshaven pirate—whatever a man could be and do without first submitting to that odious refinement of civilization, the clean shave; in a dozen different costumes, always delightful and irresponsible and seductive, and always accompanied by his short comrade, he pervaded the evening.

He spoke, and the audience laughed; he refrained from speaking, and the audience laughed.

His slapstick, that magic wand which had only to touch things to make them funny, was like himself. He had slapstick shoulders, slapstick eyebrows, ears, nose, legs, posteriors; he acted with all of these, eloquently—and at each gesture some ideal of human dignity was knocked on the head and tumbled on its nose. He sang, walked across the room, made love—and these actions, to the immense satisfaction of the audience, were revealed as essentially absurd. The precious gift he brought was a genial vulgarity, a hilarious cheapening of the values of normal life. When he spoke, with irresistible drollery, about women, about work, about marriage, about anything in the world, it became not worth a—his abrupt gesture told what—and the stout matron in the middle of the parquet became hysterical with laughter. For a moment she was not a solid block in the structure of our respectable American civilization—she was a rebellious child, delightedly come into a dream world where all burdens are lifted, all values transvalued. It seemed to do her good. . . . Then two dimpled soubrettes sang another song.

In and out between these episodes floated the chorus, shaking its immortal legs. The legs and their owners classified themselves into three ranks or hierarchies of fleshly charm: in front, the "little ones," the "ponies"; in the next row, the "mediums"; and, last and most sumptuous, the "big ones," the "show girls." The big ones were the *piece de resistance;* no frills, no sauces, but a satisfying superabundance. All that the hungry eye desired was bodied forth in these vast and shapely statues of feminine flesh, tipping the scales at not less than two hundred pounds. Two hundred pounds of arm and leg, bust and buttock; here was riches, here was Golconda—two hundred pounds of female meat! A thousand hungry eyes feasted rapturously on the sight.

But this was not the ultimate magic of burlesque.

A storm of applause, and a young woman entered on one

toe, kicking the zenith with the other. A young woman? A pinwheel, a skyrocket, a slender feminine firework! Feminine? Not with the obvious allurements of her sex. Her figure was like that of a boy; boyish was the mischievous face that sparkled behind the tangle of her short curls. She was like a sword-blade in this poppyfield of easy dreams. Her soul was adventurous, like her legs; she kicked open the zenith with her boisterous boyish laugh. She defied the code of this tinsel dream-world, in which women burn with the ready fires of miscellaneous invitation; she seemed beyond sex. Nor was she a mere bundle of graceful muscles. She had, shining in contrast to all this impersonal eroticism, a hint of personality, a will of her own, an existence independent of the wishes of the audience. She smiled at them, but scornfully, indifferently, mischievously,—and triumphed over them. That touch of reality gave a momentary sharp savour to the too-cloying illusion. Then she left the stage—on her hands—and the dream-festival went on as before.

The music pounded itself, with endless repetition, through the senses, into the soul. The rhythm of legs became the rhythm of the universe. The people of the audience were absolutely at one with each other and with the genius of the slapstick, who talked to them familiarly now, as his friends. Cries and handclaps of applause mingled with the rhythm. The heart of the theatre beat gigantically, joyously, ecstatically. The play rose to its climax. To the tune of "Yankee Doodle," the young firework appeared, turning handsprings, an American flag on the seat of her pants. Walking on her ear, she crossed the stage, waving the flag in the faces of the audience. The audience applauded in patriotic frenzy. They would have died for that flag.

The curtain fell, rose a foot from the floor, and disclosed a row of legs—legs—legs—twinkling across behind the footlights. Into those legs was concentrated the infinite sorcery of the theatre. . . . But it was time to go home. It was

time to re-enter the world of reality.—Another leg appeared, the eloquent left leg of the tall slapstick comedian, clothed round with heavy woolen drawers and clasped by a Boston garter. It seemed to say: "After all, my friends, a leg is only a leg!" The spell was broken, and the audience began slowly to file out into the dusty street.

XXXII. Duty

I

FELIX, having torn up all his previous attempts, was again at work upon a play. It seemed clear to him now that plays were not written to please the author: they were written to please the public.

There was plenty of time to work, now. They were seeing hardly anybody that summer. Clive came occasionally, and they spent a few week-ends at his place in Woods Point. They did not see Phyllis, for she was still at the normal school, having heroically decided to shorten the term of her training by taking the summer course. Dorothy Sheridan came once or twice to their studio before leaving to spend the summer in some eastern fishing village where things were very "paintable." Howard Morgan had dropped in one evening to smoke a cigarette with them. They had made the acquaintance of a taciturn etcher in the studio next door, and of an unhappily married boy-painter who lived around the corner and who used sometimes to take refuge from domestic infelicities in a cup of their coffee. . . .

It seemed to Felix that in these idle summer months, with life flowing lazily past in the sunshine, he should be able to accomplish something in play-writing. Certainly there was nothing else to distract or excite him.

He went about his task soberly and conscientously this time. He undertook to learn how plays were written. He read books on "play-construction." He even, conquering his instinctive distaste, studied the methods of Pinero and H. A. Jones. Their plays bored him ineffably—they seemed trite, false, vulgar and dull. But the public had liked them, and doubtless they had something to teach him.

"Why don't you write what you want to, in your own way?" Rose-Ann would ask impatiently.

But he did not want to write "in his own way." The things he had written to suit himself that spring, the fantastic dramatic fragments which he had torn up in disgust, were too utterly freakish, too whimsical and absurd. He wanted to prove that he could write something else—something that was not so damnably "different." He wanted to write a regular three-act play, of the sort that audiences liked, and he was going to learn to do it if it took five years. . . . It had taken Hawkins five years to get to a point where he could impress a manager—Hawkins, lending him a book on play-construction, had confessed as much. . . . And Hawkins was now on the verge of a brilliant success. He had gone to New York to collaborate with the manager on a few final changes.

It was slow going, this way; but Felix was not discouraged. It seemed good to struggle at an uncongenial task. Eventually he would conquer its difficulties. He might continue to "get by" with freakish criticism; but he was going to be a writer of plays that ordinary people could recognize as plays. It was not his business to please himself; Bernard Shaw might do that—but he, Felix, was not Bernard Shaw; it was his business to adapt himself to the realities of current play-writing. . . . He told all this to Rose-Ann, who listened in hostile silence.

Rose-Ann had changed, become less poignantly restless. She seemed to have discovered a new way of occupying herself—or rediscovered an old way, long since abandoned. "When I was a little girl," she said, "I used to read books all the time. I found them so much more satisfying than actual life. And then I stopped reading, and tried to live. I've hardly read anything since I came to Chicago. . . . So there's lots of things I want to read."

She read, day after day, from the time Felix rose from their breakfast of grapefruit and coffee and cigarettes, till afternoon, lying curled up among the pillows of the window seat; she went out for luncheon somewhere alone, and sat

in the Park all afternoon or wandered through the Museum whose crumbling stucco porticos of nobly antique pattern looked themselves like relics of some departed race; taking with her a book, which she seldom opened, but which served for companionship—and a notebook, in which she wrote sentences and paragraphs which Felix found she would rather he did not read. "They seem just to belong to me," she said, shyly.

She had retired into some inner chamber of her self, to think and dream; and the books, the walks, the wanderings among fragments of dead antiquity, the solitude, were all a part of this dream life. . . . The books which she read, a chapter or two at a time, putting one aside to take up another, were such as took the mind into strange worlds, like "Thais" and "The Napoleon of Notting Hill"; or those which told the adventures of a soul in contact with a new world which it finds strange and perilous, like "The Damnation of Theron Ware" and "The Red and the Black." Or books of anthropology and of poetry, those two ideal guides of the stay-at-home traveller in quest of strangeness. So much Felix curiously noted, and reflected that he had been at home in those strange worlds all his life and was now trying a greater adventure—the discovery of the familiar and commonplace world in which he actually lived. . . .

When Felix left the office, having hastily written "something light" for the editorial page, or furbished up a few paragraphs for the dramatic column, he would come home to the studio and work fiercely and painfully for two or three hours.

"But, Felix, you work too *hard!*" Rose-Ann had said to him. "That isn't the way to work!" Whatever the way to work might be, he had not yet found it; but at least he could try. . . . And late in the afternoon, throwing down his pen with a sense of duty done, he would go to the Park, and find Rose-Ann waiting for him on a bench, with book and note-book in her lap. They would find some cool place to dine, and then walk for hours along the shore of the lake, talking.

Yes, Rose-Ann had changed, become less fiery and impatient, more calm. And coming at this hour out of that inner chamber of self in which she spent her days, she brought to him quaint and lovely thoughts, delicate and ironic fancies, things that charmed and allured his imagination.

2

She told him one day the story of a "girl-goldsmith," a figure that seemed to have captured her imagination, in a book called "Klaus Hinrich Bass," by a German clergyman named Frenssen—a startling story to be written by a clergyman, Felix thought; but, reflecting upon Rose-Ann's father, he remembered that he knew very little about clergymen after all. It was the story of a girl who believed in the truth and goodness of her instincts; Rose-Ann told it with such zest and poetic feeling that he read it one afternoon, when she was away in the Park, for himself; and he found that she had re-created it in her own imagination, giving to Frenssen's idyl of sweet and fearless love some motives and meanings which it did not seem to him to possess as he read it in the pages of the book; it was as if Rose-Ann knew some things about that girl-goldsmith which Frenssen himself had not guessed. . . . And sometimes, when Rose-Ann told some story she had read, and Felix asked her whose it was, she pretended to have forgotten—and he wondered if it were not her own. But he feared to demand the truth, lest the shy beginnings of creative effort be frightened by his questioning.

It was strange sometimes to feel that she was entering the world of dreams just as he was leaving it.

One hot July evening, when he wanted to work on his play, she insisted on his coming outdoors with her. "You don't want to work," she said. "You know it!"

"Isn't that a good reason for working, perhaps?" he said. He had that day had a note from Hawkins in New York, and Hawkins's patient plodding and prospective success were making him feel ashamed of his own laziness.

She showed a touch of her old impatience. "Has it come to this!" she said. "Felix, do you really think the way to be an artist is to do all the things you don't want to do? I wonder if you take our marriage in the same spirit! Am I a duty, too?"

"Ridiculous child!" he said, and went out with her.

"We're going to take a ride on the lagoon," she said, and led him to the landing place, where a little launch presently chugged up and discharged its dozen passengers. Felix and Rose-Ann clambered in, and sat in the bow. The other waiting people followed them, and the boat started slowly out into the mysterious islanded waters, stabbing with its searchlight into the warm thick darkness and revealing with that unearthly light, here and there, some place of trees bending to dip their boughs into the water—the edge of one of the islands around and past which they steered slowly, turning and winding about until they seemed to be exploring a vast islanded wilderness. The breeze stirred faintly the hair of their bared heads. The others of the party appeared to be lovers happily entranced with love and with the mysterious beauty of this realm which it seemed could hardly exist in the confines of a mere park. No one spoke, except in whispers.

"Life ought to be like this," whispered Rose-Ann, taking his hand. "Not arranged and planned!"

A little later, she whispered fiercely: "Felix, are you thinking of that damned play? Then stop it!"

It was true. Felix had been thinking of his play. He became annoyed with her. She wanted him to write plays, to be a personage—and now, when he tried. . . .

As if in reply to his thought, she bent and said in his ear, "Felix, if you write a conventional play like Hawkins's, and make a success of it, I shall leave you!"

He was inwardly dismayed.

"I wonder—" said Rose-Ann aloud, and then stopped, as if startled at hearing her voice.

"Yes?" said Felix.

"Nothing," she whispered. "I'll tell you afterward."

And afterward, in a café where they had stopped for a cool drink before going home to bed, she told him that she did not want him to be successful—that she meant it quite seriously.

"It would spoil everything," she said.

"Never fear, I shan't be so successful as that," he said glumly.

"But that's just what I'm afraid of—that you will!" she said. "I looked at your scenario the other day when you were at the office; and it's—well, I've seen that play a hundred times; it's what they call sure-fire stuff."

She said this reproachfully, but Felix was elated. That was exactly what he had been trying to make it. "Do you really think so!" he asked.

"I do," she said. "And I know that if you keep on long enough, you'll succeed. But I wish you wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because, Felix, that play isn't true—not as we see truth. It makes people behave as people think they ought to—not as we know they feel. You deal in conventional emotions entirely. The only interesting person in the play is the wicked woman—and you know she isn't wicked at all, Felix, you only pretend to think so to please your audience."

"You mean the woman who tries to take the other woman's husband away from her? Oh, I know—it's stupid stuff, but—"

"Well, then, why do you do it? If you want to write about a girl who's in love with another woman's husband, why don't you do it honestly? You and I don't believe in those silly old notions. Why pretend that you think she is wicked? Just to make money? I'd rather we starved than have you write plays like that."

It was at once an immense relief to be told that he need not try any longer to write that stupid play, and a profound humiliation to be scolded by his wife. He did not know whether to be angry or ashamed. His eyes filled with

tears, and he reached across the table and laid his hand in hers in silence.

"What was it you were going to tell me there in the Park," he said after a while.

"I was thinking about 'duty,'" she said. "Your attitude toward life reminds me of a little story I read the other day—I think it was in Anatole France . . . a curious little story. . . . If you want to hear it?"

"Yes, tell me."

XXXIII. A Parable

1

FELIX searched afterward through several volumes of Anatole France for that story, but he never could find it, and he suspected that she had made it up herself . . . or perhaps it was a story her father had told her—it sounded rather like it. . . .

2

"It seems," she smilingly began, "that there was a young Roman nobleman, in the early Christian days, who was rich and handsome and beloved; and he had a slave who was a Christian. And Julian—I think that was the young nobleman's name—used to discuss Christianity with this slave. It seemed to him a barbarian superstition, but he had heard of some intelligent people becoming converted to its doctrines, so he wanted to know more about it. The slave explained. And Julian laughed, saying that these doctrines were even more absurd than he had supposed.

"But Julian, who was a perfect young Roman gentleman, always doing what was expected of him and what everybody else did, became more and more bored with the life he was living. He continued to talk with his slave about Christianity, and finally became converted. And he said, 'I see now that this life of mine is a tissue of vanities in which there is no real joy. I will renounce my wealth and my title, give up my old habits, and then receive baptism and begin a life of true Christian happiness.'

" 'Good,' said the slave. 'I will go and tell my brethren.'

"Now Julian kept a stable and had been fond of racing. He had a favourite mare which he used to hitch up to a small but elegant chariot, and drive very fast through the streets of Rome, wearing a chaplet of flowers. But all

this looked very silly to him now and so he went first of all to his stable, and said to his headgroom: "I have wasted enough time with these soulless brutes. Sell them!"

"The head-groom was thunderstruck. 'But,' he stammered, 'there are the big races next week!'

"'What of it?' said Julian.

"'Well,' said the head-groom, 'all your friends are betting on your mare, and they'll think—'

"'I don't care what they think,' said Julian.

"'I've put all the money I've got in the world on her myself,' said the head-groom, sadly. 'I've been very proud of that filly!'

"Julian was touched. This loyalty deserved an explanation from him. But how could he explain? This good-hearted simple man would never understand. He would simply think his master had gone crazy, and would hold that against Christianity. It did not seem fair that Christianity should get a black eye through such a well-meaning but hasty action as this that he had contemplated. He realized that he must go about the matter of becoming a Christian in a more practical way.

"'After all,' he said, 'there is nothing very wicked about horse-racing. I will keep my horses'—and he countermanded his order to the head-groom—'and go and give up Leila instead.' Leila was a Persian girl, and the most beautiful of his three mistresses. Once he had given her up, it would be easier to dispense with the others.

"He went to see Leila, and told her about becoming a Christian. 'Is it the thing to do?' she asked. 'Then I will become one, too!' Dear, sweet, simple soul! He tried to explain, but she understood nothing, until he said that it meant that he would have to part with her. Then she burst into tears, and cast herself at his feet, and cried out, 'Is it true, then, that you no longer love me?'

"He told her that he loved her more than ever, but in a different way: now he loved her soul. 'You have a soul, Leila,' he said, 'an immortal soul—and it is high time you began to think about saving it, too!'

" 'Stay with me,' she begged, 'and explain all these things to me. I think if you are kind to me I can understand you, and learn to save my soul, whatever that means. But do not look at me coldly, for that frightens me.'

" 'After all,' he thought, 'she has as much a right to save her soul as I have to save mine. Perhaps I had better break it to her gently. In the course of a few weeks—' And so he kissed her and stayed to explain.

"It was harder than he had realized to become a Christian. His other mistress was angry at him when he proposed to leave her, and said that it was because he preferred that Persian hussy with her silly doll-face! It pained him to have his motives so misconstrued, but why, after all, should he discriminate against this girl? She, too, had a soul. As for the third one, he put off mentioning the subject to her; he was discouraged with the results of his previous efforts, and besides, he felt that women did not understand these things very well.

" 'At least,' he said, 'I will receive baptism; and these other things will go easier after that.'

"But on the day set for the ceremony, his mother reminded him that it was the day of the festival of Diana, her favourite goddess. It had been his filial custom to escort his mother to the temple, and sprinkle with her a few grains of incense in the fire which burned before the statue of the goddess. He had never believed in the gods and goddesses—no cultivated Roman did—but it had seemed to him a harmless and pretty custom. . . . Now he endeavoured to explain to his mother why he could not accompany her. Of course the dear old lady could not understand. It seemed to her that her child had fallen under the influence of godless men, and she wept bitterly. 'To have this happen to me in my old age!' she wailed.

"He could not bear to see his mother cry like that. And it seemed to him that there must be some mistake: how could this new religion of kindness and gentleness and love command him to break his mother's heart?

"He comforted her, and said he would go with her after

all, and sent word that the baptism was to be postponed for a while.

"Julian pondered this situation in the silent hours of the night, when Leila was asleep. And it seemed to him that perhaps he, too, was a martyr—a different kind of martyr than any his Christian slave had told him about, but a martyr none the less. Upon him lay the burden of seeming to be a mere pagan profligate, sunk in idleness and debauchery, while in truth he was carrying out the precepts of kindness and gentleness and love which he had learned from his slave. He was a Christian after all—too much of a Christian to hurt anybody's feelings. And nobody would ever understand! That was the saddest part of all, and he shed a few tears, waking Leila, who was frightened by these tears, and had to be comforted. . . .

"He continued to live, in outward seeming, the ordinary life of a young Roman profligate, while inwardly his heart was dedicated to the austere practices of virtue. He wished that he could go to the desert, and wear sackcloth, and go hungry, like his more fortunate brethren. But, no—duty compelled him to bear the burden of meaningless riches and idleness and pleasure. Eventually, he was appointed governor of a Roman province, where he distinguished himself in a quiet way by the economy and orderliness of his rulership, and by a moderation of the severities currently practised against new sects. Nevertheless, strange to say, the Christians of that province hated him, and spread scandalous stories about him. He bore all this meekly, but in his breast was a profound sadness. None of those martyrs whom from his cushioned seat at the gladiatorial games he saw go, pale but erect and proud—rather spectacularly proud, he thought, to meet the lions (for after all, in spite of his moderation, he had to sacrifice a Christian virgin or two now and then to satisfy the mob)—none of them, year by year, would ever know that he too was, in his quiet unassuming way, also a martyr."

XXXIV. Journeys

1

AGAIN Felix tore up his unfinished play. Rose-Ann had shattered his philosophy of compromise. But still he hesitated to accept her philosophy of freedom. Throughout the summer he idled and dreamed.

Late in August he took his vacation. Part of it they were to spend in paying their long-due visits to their respective families; the rest was to be given to a walking trip. They went first to Springfield.

2

Rose-Ann's father lived, under the mismanagement of an unmarried sister, a fussy, well-meaning woman, in the rambling old house which Rose-Ann had described to Felix —the house in which she had been born. It was filled with vexatiously new furniture, except as to the old man's study—a shabby, comfortable, low-ceilinged, book-lined room at the top of the house. It was to this room that Rose-Ann had once stolen, in the dead of night, to get the Dan-Emp volume of the Encyclopedia, to read about dancing.

The Rev. Mr. Prentiss seemed more subdued in his home surroundings—a picturesque and mildly eccentric clergyman, but by no means the disturbing force he had been during his brief visit to them in Chicago the year before. . . . And Rose-Ann's brothers were not at all the terrible persons he had been led to imagine—interested only in money-making. They were quite obviously proud of their father; and Felix felt that they were rather proud of him, too—pleased, at least, to have a "writer" in the family. They—or their wives—had severally subscribed to the

Chicago Chronicle in order to read Felix's dramatic criticisms, which they took very seriously, and sometimes clipped out and saved for their guidance when the plays of which he wrote reached Springfield. Felix had expected to find them alien and a little hostile; on the contrary he was rather embarrassingly deferred to—treated distinctly as a personage.

He enjoyed his brief visit, and could not understand the relief Rose-Ann showed when they had bade her family good-bye and were on their way to visit his own parents on the farm further down in the state. It ought to be easy enough, he felt, to get along with such people as Rose-Ann's relatives. It was the thought of seeing his own parents that filled him with uneasiness.

"But, Felix," she explained impatiently, "it's because they *are* my relatives. I feel their criticism all the time."

"I don't think they criticize you any more," he said. "You've had a struggle with them—and you've won. They've accepted the situation now. I think they've even accepted me."

"You're not their property, and I am," she said. "But it isn't my brothers that count so much any more—we look prosperous, and that's about as far as they can judge us. It's my father—I feel as though he were seeing right through me . . . and smiling."

"Smiling at what?"

"At—my pretences. I can't explain very well, but I feel as though I were a—a fake, a fraud, when I'm with him."

"But what about?"

"I don't know, exactly. But he stirs up some childish confusion in me. . . . I think I have all my life been trying to live up to my father's expectations—not of me, for I don't think he expects anything of me—but of womankind . . . if that seems to you to make sense. It's as if I were trying to prove to him that women could be—I don't know what, but perhaps . . . different from my mother. For instance, I want to be a certain kind of wife to you, Felix—not possessive, not interfering, and all that. I go

along thinking I am that kind of wife—and then I see him looking at me and smiling, and I have the feeling that it isn't true . . . that I'm just Woman all over again, the only kind of woman he knows, the kind he hates. Yes, I feel that I am just that kind—and I wonder if there is any other kind—and I get desperate and want to prove there is. I couldn't have stood it there much longer. I should have done some crazy thing! . . . I don't suppose you can understand—you aren't a girl!"

3

He couldn't understand; though it was true that as the train carried them nearer and nearer to his own parents, he became more and more uncomfortable. . . . The situation was different enough; Rose-Ann had felt that their prosperous air secured them against family criticism; Felix felt that same appearance as a reproach to his conscience. . . .

"I've felt for years," he said, "that I was an ungrateful child. I hate to go there to exhibit my prosperity to them. Of course, it isn't so tremendous a prosperity—but it's enough to make me feel ashamed. You know how hard it is for me to write to my mother; and I hardly ever can bring myself to write except when I can send her a little money—as if, yes, as if in penance for my desertion of her!"

"Would you like to have her live with us?"

"No—I wouldn't. I owe her too much, I couldn't bear to be always reminded of the debt. It's a debt that's too huge—I never can pay it, and I try to forget it."

"The thought that she loves you more than you love her—is that what makes you feel ungrateful?"

"I suppose so. I do love her—"

"Of course you do, Felix!"

"More than I want to, perhaps! I can't forget her, and I resent that. I want to get away from her. . . . She petted and spoiled me when I was a child. She wanted to keep me a child always. She kept me in skirts, she kept me wearing long curls—she made a baby of me. My whole life is in a sense trying to get away from that. . . . You'll

see—she'll wait on me, 'hand and foot,' as they say—try to make me her baby again. She'll anticipate my wishes, and jump up from the table to get something for me, and follow me about with her eyes—and I'll get to feeling helpless, and then furious—and then I'll say something cross to her, and be ashamed of myself. . . . Oh, well!"

"So you have queer feelings about your parents, too!"

The visit did not justify all these forebodings. . . . The house was the same as Felix had remembered it, only smaller; the same boxes of moss-roses grew beside the door, and peacocks as of old screamed in the yard; there was a little porch, with a wild-cucumber vine trained up to screen out the light, and on that porch his father and mother sat, the Sunday morning of their arrival, in rocking-chairs, his mother reading a paper through spectacles that sat slightly askew, his father smoking a fat pipe. . . . They were not so old as he had in several years of absence begun to picture them; his father's plump little body looked surprisingly sturdy, and there was a youthful humour in his mother's smile as she sat talking, unaware of her son's approach. . . .

The first greetings over, Felix's two aunts appeared from within the house—really old people these, Felix thought, but still wearing their air of aggressive self-dependence. They had looked after their little farm for so many years, without any masculine assistance except from an occasional hired man, that they resented, somewhat Felix thought, his father's presence there, as a slur on their own capacity for taking care of themselves. They treated him a little scornfully, as if, being a man, he were a rather helpless person, and more of a nuisance than a help. He understood this, and smiled genially and tolerantly at their remarks, he being secure in the knowledge that it took a man to run things and that the real boss of this establishment was himself. . . . Just before they were seated at Sunday dinner, he led Felix to a cupboard, and smilingly produced a bottle of whiskey. "Have a little something to improve your appetite?" he asked.

Felix poured himself a drink, and his father did the same,

carefully raising the tumbler so as to let the light shine through the golden liquid, and smacking his lips after he had poured it down his throat—while Felix's two aunts stonily ignored this masculine nonsense, and his mother looked on with an air of mild disapproval.

At dinner they talked about the crops; his father was happy in being a farmer again; happy, after years of increasing uselessness in town while his children were growing up, in being master of a situation, the real head of a household; happy, and boyishly active, despite his spells of rheumatism, of which he also discoursed seriously and uncomplainingly. He had had a bad spell this last winter—in fact they had all been bothered with it—but they had found a liniment which seemed to do some good. "Pretty powerful stuff!" he said. "I sometimes wondered which was the worst, that liniment or the rheumatism—but it appeared to do the work!"

With the dessert they came to the fortunes of Felix—briefly alluded to before, but saved to the last for thorough consideration. They wanted to know all about Felix's job, or rather all about how important a personage he had become. Felix's shame in his good fortune gradually disappeared as he realized how immensely proud they all were of him—how they hugged his success to their hearts and enjoyed it. It was as though his good fortune were their own!

4

Rose-Ann liked them immensely, and that night reproached Felix for never having told her what lovely people they were. She entered into their domestic life, busied herself in the kitchen, and displayed qualities as a cook which he had never, in their studio-life, realized that she possessed. Their little studio-dinners had been masterpieces in their way. But to see Rose-Ann coming in flushed and triumphant from the kitchen with one dish after another of an old-fashioned country dinner in her hands was a new experience.

Rose-Ann had smoked surreptitiously during her visit to her own home, merely wishing not to offend her aunt by any ostentatious indulgence of what that good lady regarded as a reprehensible practice; but here she did not smoke at all, even in their room at night. She did not want to do anything that Felix's folks would not like, and was seriously concerned to secure their approval. . . . And she secured it—for who could resist Rose-Ann in her most buoyant mood?

The visit had not been as disturbing as he had expected; and yet he was glad to go.

"Felix," said Rose-Ann, as they took the train back to Chicago, "I think I understand why we feel this way. It's because all our lives—and this is the truth—we've scorned the older generation. And we are ashamed, coming back to face them, because we've nothing better—really—to show for our lives than they have."

"I wonder?" he said.

"But we *can* be happy in a way they knew nothing about, Felix. We can. And we shall!"

5

Then came their real vacation—a week's walking trip in Wisconsin.

The night-boat carried them from Chicago to Milwaukee; and from thence, early in the morning, dressed now in their oldest clothes, and with packs on their backs, they set out happily on foot. They stopped by the roadside to make themselves a breakfast of eggs and bacon, cooked in the ten-cent frying pan that dangled from one corner of Felix's pack; pausing again at mid-day for a luncheon of blackberries and raspberries gathered in some bramble-patch. At night they reached, in a drizzling rain that had accompanied them for the last hour of their journey, a town with an ugly little hotel, where they could at least dry their clothes, eat a poor dinner with a good appetite, and sleep, dog-tired and happy, from ten o'clock till dawn.

And thus onward, in the general direction of "the dells."

Most of the time they did not know just where they were going next, nor care; they took the most promising road.

The "dells" at last—steep ravines, miniature canyons, up which they went in the guide's leaky little gasoline launch, landing to explore the quaint caverns in the rocks, dim-lighted by the daylight that sifted through the openings above. . . . And so back, by new roads, glad they had no map to take the surprise out of their journey.

Felix had never realized how much robust strength and endurance Rose-Ann had until they tramped those Wisconsin roads. They were not above taking a lift in some farmer's wagon or passing automobile, if it promised to get them to a town with a hotel before nightfall; but, having come in sight of the town, if the night promised to be clear, they hunted up some promising spot and encamped there: for what was the use of carrying two heavy woollen blankets, if they were not going to sleep out under the stars by a camp-fire?

Felix's old corduroys, splashed with kalsomine in all colours, caused him to be taken for an "artist." At first this displeased him—but he soon discovered that all the world envies the artist, loves him, and wishes to take care of him. Old farmers, burly truck-drivers, delivery-boys, tourists, wanted to give them a lift, and offered them their best counsel as to where to go next. Hotel-keepers, grocers at whose shops they replenished their food supplies, and farmers' wives at houses where they stopped till a shower passed over, talked to them with friendly eagerness. Felix perceived that a pair of foot-loose vagabonds with enough money in their pockets to pay for their bread and eggs and bacon, are fortunate beings, the world's darlings, beamed on and approved by those who sleep under roofs and hold steady jobs and stay day after day in the same place—approved because they are living life as all men and women know it should be lived: if everybody cannot live that way themselves, they are glad to see somebody else who can!

As they tramped, Felix's mind went back to the songs of vagabondia which he used to cherish, and then had

rejected as romantic and foolish; and at night, beside their dying camp-fire, when Rose-Ann demanded poetry before she went to sleep, he would say for her the little fragments that he remembered:

"Down the world with Marna,
That's the life for me!
Wandering with the wandering rain
It's unboundaried domain. . . .

"Mm—I forget. Anyway—

". . . . the joys of the road are chiefly these—
A crimson touch on the hard-wood trees. . . .
A vagrant's morning, wide and blue,
In early fall, when the wind walks, too. . . .
A shadowy highway, cool and brown,
Alluring up and enticing down. . . .
A scrap of gossip at the ferry,
And a comrade neither glum nor merry,
Asking nothing, revealing naught,
But minting his words from a fund of thought. . . .
A keeper of silence eloquent. . . .

"Mm. . . .

"With only another mile to wend,
And two brown arms at the journey' s end. . . .

"I forget the rest of it."

"You are forgetting everything that's important!" Rose-Ann complained. "I'll bet you know by heart Professor Humptydink's law of dramatic crisis."

"No—I've stopped that foolishness, thanks to you. If I ever write anything, it will be just what I want to write—and the devil take the Great American Public!"

"No, Felix—that's wrong, too. It's what one really wants to say that other people really like—I'm sure of it. Can't you trust yourself?"

"I don't know," he said, looking up at the pale moon through a tangle of leafy branches. "Somehow I have the notion that anything I want to do will be foolish. . . . I

used to trust in myself. I used to believe *this* sort of thing: —it's by Bliss Carman, the man that wrote the vagabond poems.—

"Keep thou, by some large instinct,
Unwasted, fair and whole,
The innocence of nature,
The ardor of the soul—

"And through the realms of being
Thou art at liberty
To pass, enjoy, and linger,
Inviolate, and free!"

"And don't you believe that now, Felix?"

"That I can do as I please, if—"

"If it's what you really please to do! Yes, Felix. You can have any happiness you ever want, if you really want it—not cynically, nor because other people seem to have it, but because it *belongs* to you. I believe that. I don't intend ever to keep from doing anything I want to do. And I shan't be ashamed of myself, either. Do you remember the girl-goldsmith I told you about, in the story?"

"I remember her very well," said Felix. "I know one of her speeches almost by heart. 'The only sins are telling lies, and not keeping one's body clean, and being careless about one's work—ugly things. Beautiful things—the things people sometimes call sins—aren't sins at all. Being in love isn't ever a sin.'"

"Yes," said Rose-Ann dreamily. "I want us to be like that—not afraid of life, or of any of the beautiful things life brings us."

Well . . . yes . . . it sounded simple enough. To live life beautifully, and not be afraid! He had believed in that once. But now—or had he really ceased to believe it possible? At this moment, in the moonlight, it did not seem so absurd. . . .

"Good night, Felix."

"Good night, Rose-Ann."

XXXV. Civilization

I

THEY came back refreshed to civilization—to the studio, to a whirl of exciting parties, to books and ideas, to the problems of ambition, to the Chronicle office and a theatrical season just opening with hectic announcements of "Alias Jimmy Valentine," "The Case of Becky," "The Pink Lady" and "The Chocolate Soldier.". . .

Hawkins was still in New York, assisting in the selection of a cast for his play—which to Felix's complete astonishment (for Hawkins had not confided anything to him as to its theme or character) was announced as "Tootsie-Wootsie." A farce!—with, as it further appeared, honeymoon couples and wrong bedrooms. . . . What? Hawkins, the serious Hawkins, who had so often called upon American drama to do its duty and deal with "the problems of the time"—he the author of a play called "Tootsie-Wootsie"?

The news of Hawkins's play brought up in Felix's mind a practical question which so far he had refused to consider. It had been exciting enough to be the acting dramatic critic of the Chronicle; he had not wanted to look ahead any further. But when one day at lunch he ran into Jennison ("the dean of the critical fraternity"), Jennison asked him, "Are you going to do the plays for the Chronicle?" "Yes, while Hawkins is away," Felix told him. "Does Hawkins know it?" "Yes—he asked me to." "Well," said Jennison, smiling, "then he's a damn fool!" That was old Jennison's way of paying him an extravagant compliment. It was in its way an accolade. It was an initiation, by the grand past master, into the "critical fraternity." And now Felix felt obliged to consider the question of Hawkins and Hawkins's play in its bearing upon his own career.

If Hawkins's play failed—and most plays did fail—Hawkins would return and resume his post on the Chronicle. In that event, Felix would be relegated to doing the odd jobs that Hawkins did not want to do. He might even be put back to regular reporting. After all, the present arrangement merely provided for a dramatic critic in Hawkins's absence; it was not likely they would want two men continuously on the job. They had given Felix another raise that fall; and when Hawkins came back, he would have to earn his salary doing regular reporter's work again, doubtless—if he *could* earn it that way. It was rather a dismal prospect. . . . Felix hoped fervently that the serious-minded Hawkins would somehow, improbably, turn out a success as a farceur.

But if it was a success, and Hawkins resigned his position, how could Felix know he would get it? After all, he was only twenty-three years old. And though by a fluke he was actually *being* for a while the dramatic critic of a great Chicago newspaper, the idea that he should retain this position and be confirmed in its title was incredible. He wished that he were not so fatally young. . . .

Well—he could only wait and see what happened.

It was at this period that he began wearing a moustache—a short, well-defined moustache, aloof from the upper lip, trim and straight. Nothing boyish, certainly about that moustache!

2

Felix and Rose-Ann had come back to Chicago eager to see Clive Bangs again. They had been away just long enough to discover, in apparently all human beings except themselves, a fundamental lack of interest in all the ideas which most occupied their minds. Talk, with people in general, was limited to an exchange of views, if not on the weather, at least on things equally obvious. They felt the need for talk, and so did Clive; and all at once, after what now seemed to them these months of merely casual friendship, they became inseparable. The three of them lunched

together daily at a corner table in a little Hungarian restaurant where they found what they considered the best food in Chicago—a fond trio, laughing, talking excitedly, arguing with the mingled gravity and extravagance of youth, sometimes rehearsing passionately in private the opinions which they would state tomorrow somewhat more soberly in print, and again discussing each other's characters with ironic humour—perpetually criticizing and taking delight in each other's criticism of life.

XXXVI. "We Needs Must Know That in the Days to Come

I

THEY had come back to civilization. But—unwittingly, at first—into this life of talk, of ideas, of theory, of vague ambition and of self-congratulatory superiority to the mere plain facts of life, they brought somewhat more than a memory of their vagabond adventuring. In their brief and joyous return to nature they had surrendered themselves to its purposes more deeply than they had been aware. But presently Rose-Ann announced that she would have to visit the doctor of whom Dorothy Sheridan had once told her. Rose-Ann did not say that she was with child—that phrase was never used between them in their few discussions of the incident. For that phrase would have implied that she intended to bear a child. It was discussed rather as an accident, an annoying but not serious interruption to their plans. Rose-Ann took the matter, not lightly, but in a soberly practical spirit. And so convincing was her tone that it did not occur to Felix to question the sincerity of her apparent attitude.

Secretly he was troubled. In spite of Rose-Ann's confidence, he distressed himself with what appeared to be needless forebodings. It seemed to be true that real life was, in this matter as in others, different from fiction. In a story, this would have been a desperate situation; but in actual fact it appeared to have no such gravity. He hoped that was indeed the truth; and, afterward, it appeared that she had been right. . . . He wondered why he had been so absurd about it!

She would never know how absurd. . . . He would never

tell her how, one night, walking alone along a dark stretch of lake shore, his courage had failed him utterly; how all the terrible things of which he had ever heard had rushed into his mind, filling and flooding it with a kind of nameless remorse, until he had ceased to be a man, and had become a mere terrified child—and how in the influence of that guilty terror he had sunk on his knees in the wet sand, praying to a God he did not believe in, whispering like a child to a kind Father: "God, don't let anything happen to her!" He had not thought of her then as a free woman acting wisely in her own right—no, but only as a helpless and lovely girl, his beloved, given him to cherish and protect, whom he had let go down to the very gates of death—in vain! Not in the terrible triumph of creation, but meaninglessly. . . . And he prayed: "Give me back Rose-Ann!". . .

No, he would never tell her what a fool he had been.

2

And he would never tell her—for he had safely forgotten now—the moment when, knowing that their lives could go on now as before, they had walked again in the Park under great trees that lifted their shivering glooms to the sky. Through the bushes had come the gleam of motor-cars that glided swiftly down the avenue. "You were a dear to worry,"she had said. "But you needn't any more. Everything's quite all right now."

He had looked at her, cut through with a strange unreal pain, his whole mind quivering. Forces that he did not understand were hurling themselves on his heart, crushing and stunning it. He breathed with difficulty. He looked away from her. He could not speak.

But one forgets things like that. It would not be pleasant to remember them. Nor is it hard to forget unpleasant things in the midst of civilization, with its friendships, parties, talk, books and theories.

So, looking at life realistically, Felix felt that he and Rose-Ann were very fortunate, after all.

XXXVII. Symbols

I

ROSE-ANN had become restless again. Once more she threatened to go out and get a job. Books no longer contented her; and if she had secretly cherished, as Felix had thought, some dreams of writing, they had vanished, like her notebook, which was no more to be seen. They gave wild parties, extended the number of their friends, and went to dinner-parties, where Rose-Ann shone as always, and even Felix began to be able to take care of himself. She went to the theatre with Felix and took down his criticizms on her typewriter from dictation, as she had a year ago. But these activities did not quite content her volatile spirit.

Her restlessness expressed itself, delightfully enough, in a resumption of the endless midnight talks which had marked the first period of their married intimacy. Their daylight hours together now seemed never to suffice them for talking. Those hours were too filled up with work, and play, and friends. During the day a thousand ideas, observations, comments, stories, had been stored away by each for the other's benefit. A glance at dinner had meant: "Did you see that? Yes—we'll talk about it tonight." In these gatherings, however friendly and outspoken, something was always left unsaid, reserved especially for each other. The heart of every occasion was in its midnight aftermath, in the long wakeful hours in bed, remembering, criticizing, laughing, talking, talking. . . . Marriage had come to mean above all else the peculiar magic of that intimacy. Sometimes her voice would come mysteriously out of the dark at his side, and again the moonlight would creep in over the roofs and tease the scene with its glamour. Their

beds, in summer two little oases of coolness in the sultry night, became in winter warm-coverleted citadels against the cold—two little friendly islands, with two voices floating pleasantly back and forth. "Light me another cigarette," Rose-Ann would say sleepily. Tired, but kept awake by all they had to tell each other, the mere thoughts and incidents of the day made precious by this re-living of them together, they lay and talked out their hearts.

2

"Felix strikes me as rather paintable. Could you spare him a few afternoons for a sitting now and then? I mean, some time this winter? I'm getting interested in doing portraits again."

"I'd love to have you!"

Dorothy Sheridan had come back from her fishing village, and a little trip abroad to boot, and she and the Fays were dining in a little restaurant to which she had taken them—not very far from their studio, a little Italian place frequented by artists, where the food was good and the prices low. The men one saw there wore soft collars, like Felix's own, sometimes turned up to flare about the chin, sometimes open at the neck; one of the girls at the tables wore a Russian smock, like Dorothy Sheridan, and all of them seemed, like her, comfortably uncorseted. They all seemed to know each other, and each new person who came greeted the whole roomful. It was a friendly place.

Felix was rather amused at having his afternoons asked for and given away without his being consulted. But he was flattered by the invitation. He had never been painted, and he considered it a distinction.

"It will be a bore," Dorothy warned him. "You'll get awfully tired of it before I'm through. But I'll do you in half a dozen sittings, I promise you, or give it up. Give him a cup of coffee, before he comes. I don't talk to my subjects, and they are likely to fall asleep!"

They had been to Dorothy Sheridan's studio that afternoon, and looked at her paintings and sketches. The paint-

ings were, with one or two exceptions, in a vivid, splashing style that Felix liked. "I've changed my style since going to Paris," she said. "These things are what they call over there Post-Impressionist. I'll do you in my best Cezanne-Matisse manner, Felix, with some variations all my own. You won't know yourself!"

Rose-Ann had been most impressed by some of Dorothy's old sketches, particularly a series of lovely nudes done in pencil with a hard, vibrant line. Dorothy picked one of them out and gave it to Rose-Ann. "Here's one that looks like you," she said, appraising Rose-Ann's figure with a judicious eye. "You can use it for a book-plate if you like."

It was like Rose-Ann, Felix thought, when she pinned it on the wall that night—it had the same firm and delicate contours, the same sweet livingness of a body that is made for movement, for action, for intense and poignant use. The figure in the drawing was poised in the hesitant instant before flight, with head turned to look backward, and the whole body ready at the next moment either to relapse again into reassured repose or to put all its force into some wild dash for freedom. And somehow that too reminded him of Rose-Ann—of Rose-Ann's soul.

Rose-Ann was looking at the picture with eyes in which some purpose fulminated darkly.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"That I shall never wear corsets again! It's really absurd, isn't it? To imprison one's body in such a thing as that. . . . I'm going to burn mine up—now!" And presently, in her chemise and stockings, she solemnly knelt before the Franklin stove and laid the offending article upon the live coals.

"The last of my conventions!" she said, as if to herself.

And then, as it commenced to smoulder, and an acrid odour of burnt rubber emerged, she wrinkled her nostrils and put her thumb and finger to them. "It thmells bad!" she said. And reflectively: "I suppose conventions always do, at the end. . . . Well, it's gone now, and my body is free.—Gone forever, leaving nothing but a . . . faint un-

pleasant odour, shall I say?—behind. . . . Felix—would you mind if I cut off my hair?"

"Cut off—!"

"Short, you know. Like Dorothy Sheridan's. I've always wanted to. And I never quite had the nerve. Living here, it seems only natural. You wouldn't mind?"

She loosened her hair and it fell about her shoulders, like a flame. "I think it would curl if it were cut. It did when I was a little girl."

"We've no scissors," said Felix, practically—deferring in his own mind the question of whether he would like her hair cut short or not. He did not know. It would look well—there was no doubt at all of that. He had always wondered at the foolish vanity of women, in putting up with the inconvenience of long hair. He had felt that long hair was in some way a badge of woman's dependence on man, a symbol of her failure to achieve freedom for herself. And yet . . . when it came to Rose-Ann's hair—

Rose-Ann read his face as a wife can. "No, I suppose not," she said, and sighed. "No scissors! Well, there's always something to prevent one from being rash. In the morning I shan't want to—because I'm going out to look for a job. . . ."

Felix smiled. "Wolf! wolf!" he mocked gently. He had heard that threat of a job too often to be alarmed about it now.

"You'll see," said Rose-Ann gaily.

3

Felix was accustomed, by masculine prerogative, to get up first on cold mornings and shake down the fire and make the coffee. But this morning, having dreamed that he had arisen and performed these duties (a very realistic dream—he had heard the noise of the poker among the coals and smelled the fragrance of hot coffee!) he awoke to see Rose-Ann coming toward him with a cup and saucer, on a lacquered tray.

"Your morning draught, my lord!"

"Rose-Ann!" he said angrily. She should have let him make that coffee. . . .

She knelt and offered him the cup, with the air of a page-boy. Then it was that he saw that her hair was shorn. Short bronze locks fell clustering about her face in tiny curls, making it boyish, and yet, it seemed, more girlish than ever. She turned sideways as he stared, and tilted her head. For the first time its proud contour stood fully and beautifully revealed. "Isn't that better than an old top-knot?" she said.

"But how—" he began.

"Borrowed scissors from neighbour," she replied. "What are neighbours for, if not to depend on in an emergency?"

"Why is this an emergency?" he demanded, still withholding his approval. "Couldn't you wait and go to the barber?" Some of the edges, he noted, were rather jagged.

"No, Felix. Don't you remember Browning's poem about the Statue and the Bust? One puts off things. 'So days grew months, years.' Moral: do it now.—But do you like me this way, Felix?"

"Of course I like you." And then, since he did, he added: "Tremendously!"

"You—you approve?"

"Yes, but what of that? Can't you do what you like whether I approve or not? Aren't you a free woman?" he teased her.

"That's what I said to myself. And so I did it. But—I'm glad you like it, Felix, because—because I'm not sure whether I do or not!"

He laughed. "It will grow again."

"No—I shan't let it grow again. I'm going to like it, I know—eventually; perhaps very soon. It's just at first. . . . But I suppose that's the way with freedom! . . . Drink your coffee, Felix, before it gets cold. I'll bring mine over there, too. Do you love me—very much? Look out—you'll spill the coffee!"

XXXVIII. The Portrait of Felix Fay

1

ROSE-ANN'S bobbed hair was generally applauded. There were more studio parties. Felix frivoled, theorized, and wrote jocund dramatic criticisms, with the thought of Hawkins always at the back of his mind.

Hawkins's play had been cast, re-cast, rewritten, and finally tried out "on the dog," that is to say, an audience at Atlantic City. And something was still wrong. So the cast had been dismissed, the scenery stored, and Hawkins was desperately rewriting his play for the seventeenth time—this time in collaboration with an expert farce-builder. And Felix remained for a while longer the acting dramatic critic of the Chronicle. He figured that if enough misfortunes happened to Hawkins's farce, his own tenure in office might last long enough to entitle him to it in the end. With the most amiable feelings toward Hawkins, he nevertheless fervently wished "Tootsie-Wootsie" the worst of bad luck.

Meanwhile, early in January, he began having his portrait painted by Dorothy Sheridan.

2

Having one's portrait painted was decidedly an experience. When he came for his first sitting, he found Dorothy Sheridan in a big kitchen apron, with her sleeves rolled up, looking more as if she were going to cook a meal than paint a picture. She had called "Come!" to his knock, and when he entered she went on scraping the paint from a palette with no more than a casual nod to him. He put his hat under his arm, and shifting his stick to the crook of his elbow, took out a cigarette and lighted it; then turned and looked curiously and hesitantly about the room.

"There! Keep that! Just that way!" Dorothy Sheridan called. "That's very good. Very characteristic. No, just as you were. That's right—relax a little."

She gave him these orders from half way across the large studio room, where she stood in a brusque commanding attitude. Felix obeyed.

"One minute!" And she ran up the steps to the mezzanine behind and above Felix, and presently he heard from overhead the swish of falling cloth. He half turned, and saw that she had flung over the edge of the mezzanine railing a long piece of rose-coloured silk, which reached the floor behind him.

"That's for a background," she said, and Felix resumed his pose.

She came back, pushed out an easel not far from him and a little to one side, and then took up a position at a distance from both him and the easel, armed with a brown crayon. She looked at him intently, with wide eyes, bending a little, with head forward and face uplifted. "Mm," she said, reflectively, and walked swiftly up to the easel and commenced to draw upon the blank canvas with swift, vigorous strokes of her crayon. After a little, she walked back to her former place, resumed her wide-eyed stare, and then returned once more to the canvas.

After half an hour of this, looking at her subject and drawing on the canvas in turn, she threw down her crayon. "Can you remember that pose?" she asked.

Of course Felix could remember it. It was a pose into which he fell naturally. "Yes," he said. "May I look?"

"If you want to," she said indifferently, taking off her apron.

Felix strolled over and looked at the crayon sketch on the canvas. It was a bold caricature of himself, poised hesitantly with stick and cigarette, blithe, debonair, and above all a figure of indecision. Was that himself?

"That's all for today," said the painter. "Same time, same day, next week. Don't forget."

He went away, startled and puzzled.

Next week, as he came in, eager for one more look at that disconcerting caricature, he found the artist painting it out with a thin grey wash.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"Oh, that was only to get the pose," she said. "This time I want to get the likeness."

The portrait seemed to Felix completed at the end of an hour, when she declared the sitting over and took off her apron. It was utterly different from the crayon caricature which had preceded it on the canvas. Out of the misty grey background emerged a face and two hands, delicately painted, and catching the quizzical expression of mouth and eyes and the rather limp gesture of the hands, but in a manner which did not carry more than a few feet from the canvas. Moreover, this painting was utterly unlike the other things of hers that he had seen. He wondered, but the painter had hung up her apron and was looking at a portfolio of drawings, indifferent to his existence, so he withdrew.

The next time provided still a new surprise. The painter had just washed out the face and hands on the canvas with turpentine, and was scraping off the paint when he came in. Was this a confession of failure? or some new way of painting? or simply the way all painters went to work?

He was pretty certain, however, that the method pursued in this present sitting was extraordinary; for this time the painter measured his head with a pair of calipers, up and down and in every direction, and noted down the figures on a piece of paper and regarded them thoughtfully. Then she came up to him and felt of his skull with her hands; it was not in the least like a caress—it was exactly as if she were a surgeon, and he were a patient, about to be operated upon.

"Bones!" she said, as if that explained everything, and went to work on her canvas with a brush dipped in blue paint. . . . The result, which Felix viewed with a very queer sensation at the end of the sitting, was a skeleton-like figure done in blue, with arms and legs like pieces of steel machin-

ery, and a face with dark blue eyesockets and a pale blue jaw. . . . "Lines of force," explained the painter, and he went away not knowing whether to laugh or not.

This skeleton was obliterated at the beginning of the fourth sitting, as the other stages of the picture had been, and Felix wondered, what next? Colour, it seemed, this time! Great splashes and daubs of colour, put on anyhow, spread out with a palette-knife, or the painter's thumb—a riot, an orgy of rose and green and purple-brown, with only a suggestion of Felix amid the chromatic swirls. . . .

Felix described each of these stages to Rose-Ann with zest, and went with infinite curiosity to every new sitting. . . .

The fifth time there was a blank new canvas awaiting him, and when he asked what had become of the other, she replied: "Burned it up. All covered with paint. Always use a fresh canvas if you can afford it."

She emerged from her preoccupation with her palette long enough to become aware of his surprise, and to explain further:

"All that was just getting acquainted with my subject. Now we're ready to begin."

And taking up her position, a little closer this time to him and the easel, she bent upon him that wide-eyed, impersonal stare . . . Felix was rather in awe of her by this time. She had ceased to seem to him the careless, slangy bohemian girl that he had first known. She was an expert and delicate technician. Those four portraits in succession had stunned his imagination. She seemed to him almost superhuman—with a little of the flavour of black magic in her. That wide-eyed impersonal stare was part of the effect. At first she seemed merely a pretty girl lifting her face to yours and looking at you, steadily; and if one was not used to returning the wide-eyed stare of a pretty girl, one became a little embarrassed—there is something so intimate about this meeting and touching through the eyes; one seems to be let in, unreservedly, to some mysterious depth. But, as the stare continued, piercing you, probing you, seeing you

with calm indifference, you became uneasy and almost afraid—you wanted to look away, and that seemed cowardly and evasive, so you kept on staring back as long as you could . . . until those dark blue eyes of hers seemed profound gulfs over which you hung, dizzy, tottering, about to drown. . . . And then, saying "Mm," she went over to her canvas again and put on a little dab of paint. She had probably been considering carefully whether or not she had made your nose too long!

3

Felix raved in this fashion to Rose-Ann, who heard him with interest and in silence till he had finished.

"And what does the portrait look like now?" she asked.

"Well—very much like any other portrait, I must say. A little bolder, and lots of colour, but nothing startling. Or perhaps I've become so used to startling things by now that this seems a little tame."

The last sitting was a prolonged one, in which the painter looked at him for what seemed hours at a time, and in which he could not rid himself of the perturbing conviction that she was seeing into his soul. . . . He was very tired when she finished at last—the sitting had as a matter of fact taken two hours, with only a few momentary rests—and Felix was in a mood of weariness and self-distrust when he went over to look at the completed portrait. Perhaps that accounted for what he saw:

Painted with an exquisite and mordant irony—with stick and cigarette, uncertainly halting, as if in front of life, the head tilted with a quirk of inquiry, the face curious and evasive, with something that was almost boldness in the eyes, something that was almost courage in the chin—Felix Fay, observant, indecisive, inadequate, against a rose-coloured background.

XXXIX. A Date on the Calendar

I

THE memory of that portrait left Felix bewildered and irritated. It seemed that no one else saw in it quite what he had seen. Rose-Ann praised it—but with some reserve which made him feel that she did not really like it. Clive was delighted with the certainty with which the painter had captured his characteristic gesture. . . . Only he himself, apparently, saw it as a criticism, profound and harsh. . . .

The painter herself least of all saw it as a criticism. "Is that what you really think of me?" he had asked her.

"I don't think when I paint pictures," she had said. "I'm too busy working out the problems of form and colour. Don't you like it?"

"I like it as a picture. I don't like it as a—a prophecy," he said.

"A prophecy? Oh, there you come with your literary interpretations. Can't you forget that stuff, and learn to look at a picture as a picture?"

She had ceased to be the Sybyl, and become again the careless bohemian girl-artist, talking the talk of her tribe. . . . Pictures were just pictures—yes, he had heard that before.

Morose and fretful, he walked up and down in the studio in the evening, rejecting Rose-Ann's plans for other entertainment; or sat at his desk, exasperatedly trying to force himself to begin work on some half-formed idea for a play. He was angry at himself for being the indecisive, inadequate figure of that painting. He saw now what being an artist meant—the calm energy, the technical erudition, the vast patience that was needed. He wished to be that kind of

person. And the more he wished it, the more weak and petulant he seemed to himself. And what must he seem to Rose-Ann? She must despise him in her heart. . . .

For a week he fidgeted and fumed about the studio, ashamed of his childish behaviour and yet unable to control it. He wondered why Rose-Ann did not tell him what she really thought of him. . . . It was as if he were trying, by a more and more outrageous parade of his weakness, to force her to break silence and speak out.

Late one afternoon, when he had crumpled up the sheet of paper on which he had been trying to write, and thrown it on the floor with a silly gesture of failure, she put down her sewing and came up to him.

She put her hand on his shoulder.

"What is the matter, Felix, dear?" she asked.

He drew himself away. "I wish you would let me alone," he said.

"Very well," Rose-Ann said gently, and went and put on her hat and cloak and left the studio.

2

For a moment he sat there, looking at the door through which she had gone with a sudden sense of utter desolation.

They had had quarrels before, but this was different. He had driven her away. . . . It would serve him right if she never came back. . . .

Why had he been making such a fool of himself? Why had he been behaving like a silly child?

And all at once he felt that he knew the answer. . . . He was worrying about that damned job of his.

Rose-Ann had taken it for granted that he was secure in his position. He had pretended to weigh his chances, pro and con. . . . And all the while he had been deeply convinced that he was about to lose his momentary distinction. Hawkins's play was being tried out again, this week. It would fail, he would give up his foolishness, return to Chicago, and Felix would be back precisely where he had started. That, of course, though he had not told Rose-Ann,

was why he had felt she was right in not wanting to have children right away.

It was this impending crisis in his career that secretly worried him. For nearly a year he had been a dramatic critic—and he was about to lose his job. It was a degradation intolerable to contemplate, but impossible to prevent. How could he prevent it? In romantic novels, the hero wins his spurs. But there were, so to speak, only one pair of critical spurs at the disposal of the Chronicle, and they belonged to Hawkins! In a magazine story, Felix would go over to another paper and get a better job. But Felix disbelieved in his ability to hold with any distinction any ordinary reporter's job. By some fluke he had made good as a dramatic critic. He saw people on the elevated turning the paper inside out to read first of all his column about the new play. He knew he had made good. But—dramatic editorships do not grow on blackberry bushes; dramatic critics die in their shoes at an advanced age. Hawkins's folly had given him such a chance as would never happen again in a hundred years.

A chance? A brief hour of glory. An hour for Rose-Ann to be proud of him, to believe that he had risen by force of character to these heights, that he would continue to rise. . . . She would find out that it had been mere luck. She would find out that he could not even keep a job as a dramatic critic, let alone become a playwright. She would discover him for what he was—a weak, helpless, scared child.

That was why he had been behaving like a fool before her—to show her beforehand that he didn't amount to anything.

Suddenly he commenced to laugh. The mood of the last week had vanished—it merely seemed funny now. Another attack of moon-calfishness, that was all! That painter-girl had awed him with her astounding technique, made him feel incompetent and helpless—thrown him back into a state of adolescent self-distrust. Yes, it was her fault, the pretentious hussy! And what, after all her fussing, did that picture of hers amount to? An ordinary portrait, that was

all, with a touch of easy caricature in it. . . . Damn her!

And what if Hawkins did come back and take away his laurels? There were other jobs in the world. If not in Chicago, then—

Yes, in New York. . . .

It didn't make any difference what happened. He had been silly to worry about things. He would never worry again about anything. Rose-Ann was right. One must live fearlessly. . . .

He wished Rose-Ann would come back. . . .

3

The door opened, and she was there. He sprang up.

She shut the door behind her and put her back against it, and her hands, as if to support herself.

Felix stood staring at her in surprise. She was pale, and she had a heroic air, somehow. She tried to speak—twice—and made no sound, only a movement of the throat and lips.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously, going up to her.

She put out her hands, as if to hold him away, and let them rest on his shoulders. She looked at him earnestly.

"Felix," she said. "Felix. . . . I know what is troubling you."

"Yes?" he said, confusedly.

"It's that girl. You're in love with her, Felix. Well—I keep my promise. You—you can—"

"What girl?" he asked, amazed.

"Dorothy!" she cried. "You're in love with her. I knew it all along."

"What!"

"Yes. I can't bear to see you unhappy. I'd rather—"

He laughed and took her in his arms. "Little fool!" he said. "Little silly child! Dear little idiot!"

She burst out crying, and put her head on his shoulder.

"I'm not in love with anybody, you goose, except you," he said. "What made you think I was? I suppose I have

been acting crazy. I know I have. But it's a different kind of craziness. I was worrying about—my job."

"Your job?" She looked up from his shoulder. "Have you heard already? I just left Clive at the corner."

"Clive? Heard what? I don't know what you're talking about."

"He was coming down to tell you the news. You don't know it? Well—a telegram came this afternoon. From Hawkins. He's resigned. And you've been appointed in his place."

"Really!"

"Yes, of course. I knew that was what would happen. But Felix—are you sure?" She meant about Dorothy.

"You're crazier than I am, Rose-Ann—that's all."

"Well—" and she dried her tears. "I guess I am a fool. . . . But Felix—I left Clive at the corner drug-store. I was very mysterious, and said he mustn't come here to the studio, but that he was to wait there for me."

"What for?"

"I—told him I wanted him to help me celebrate an—occasion. But—"

"What kind of occasion?" Felix asked sternly. "Did you tell him any of this nonsensical—"

"No, Felix, I didn't tell him anything. But—but we can still celebrate an occasion, Felix."

"You mean my job?"

"No—I mean the—the anniversary of our marriage. . . ."

"You poor abused darling! What an idiot I am!" And he took her in his arms again.

"I'll wash my face, and be sensible now," she said. "You go and get Clive, and—and we'll celebrate!"

XL. Celebration

I

THERE was something puzzling to Felix about that celebration. . . .

Surely no marriage anniversary had ever before been marked in quite this fashion—by a wife's offer to give up her husband's love to another woman!

Already Rose-Ann appeared to have forgotten that incident, as she sat, flushed and happy, at the table with Felix and Clive in the gay restaurant they had chosen. Or no, not forgotten it; for it might perhaps be that very memory, even more than the occasion itself, which made her so radiant—that secret, giving to a commonplace occasion a special quality of romantic uniqueness!

So Felix, watching her, thought he read her mind. And he was perturbed. She had enjoyed that fictitious renunciation. She had needed the taste, as it were, of bitterness, to savour their happiness. She loved him; and she had played with the idea of losing his love. . . . To have faced that danger—yes, to have faced it, even more than to have come off safely—intoxicated her. There was a new light in her eyes, a dancing light of joyous and reckless courage, a new pride in the toss of her head with its cluster of red-gold curls. . . .

He felt that to her it was not enough to be happy; her happiness must be snatched from the jaws of peril. She was grateful to him, not for being in love with her after all—but for having given her occasion for a moment to think otherwise!

A strange creature to have for a wife, he meditated, watching her. She was more lovely tonight than she had

ever been, he thought. . . . And by what bond did he hold this strange and lovely creature by his side? Not by the tie of any promise. She had made him no promises. . . . There was no security in their relationship; she did not want security! She wanted adventure; and so long as their marriage was an adventure—!

That was what they were celebrating—not the mere passage of one year of a lifelong marriage, but the beginning of another year of rash adventure. . . . And in what curious and fantastic ways would their love be tested in that year to come? He wondered. . . .

2

"Have you heard about McQuish?" Clive was saying to Rose-Ann.

"No? What?" she asked.

"I told you," said Felix, "that he had had a row with the Old Man over a book review he wrote."

"Oh, yes, so you did. And that he's talking of leaving to write a novel."

"Chicago moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform," said Clive. "Do you remember, Felix, when you came on the paper a year or so ago?—McQuish was the Marvellous Boy, then. The Old Man was proud of him. He could write whatever he liked. . . . And now the Old Man reads every word he writes with a suspicious eye. They had this row last week; and it's the beginning of the end. . . . I know: I had my day a little earlier than McQuish; now it's all I can do to get along. That's what happens to young intellectuals in Chicago. They are fed up on praise and petting for a year or two; and then they get thrown out on their necks. And a darn good thing, too! Otherwise we would stay here and write fiddling things for the daily papers all our lives. But now McQuish will quit and write a novel; and if I have any sense, I will do the same."

"And my turn will come next, you mean?" Felix asked.

"Not for a while. . . . I've been trying to figure the thing

out. Felix came here, you know, scared to death of Chicago; he can't believe yet in his good luck! He didn't really believe he was going to get Hawkins's job. Everybody else knew he was slated for it. . . . When you go back to the office tomorrow, Felix, the Old Man will give you a cigar and tell you what a fine fellow you are. And it will take him all of a year to discover that you aren't a fine fellow. . . . We are a deceptive lot, we young intellectuals; the powers that be think they can use us in their business; and it's some time before they wake up to discover that we are playing a game of our own. . . . I give you a year at least to flourish in, Felix! And make the most of it—for about this time next year you will be pulling up stakes and departing elsewhere. What do you think, Rose-Ann?"

"I don't care," said Rose-Ann. "So long as things keep happening!"

3

They had said good-night to Clive and came back to the studio. Rose-Ann turned to Felix suddenly, just inside the closed door.

"You remember what I told you here—a little while ago," she began.

"Yes," he said, doubtfully.

She looked at him earnestly. "I meant it, you know," she said.

"Oh—that!"

"Yes. . . . I'm terribly glad it wasn't true, what I thought—about you and Dorothy. But if it had been—!"

"Don't let's talk about it," he said uncomfortably.

"But Felix!" she protested.

"Well?"

"I know I was crying, and behaving like a silly idiot and everything—but you must believe that I meant what I said. Do you, Felix?"

Her face was grave now, her eyes solemn. Something in his heart leaped to rejoice in the courage that lay behind

her utterance. He wanted to believe it, and at the same time he feared to believe it.

She read the doubt in his eyes.

"You don't believe me?" she said. "If the time ever comes to prove it, Felix—"

He smiled. "We'll cross our bridges when we come to them," he said.

Book Five

Garfield Boulevard

XLI. Changes

1

THE second year of marriage began for Felix with a sense of uneasy anticipation. It was as if things—strange, unknown things—were about to happen.

He tried, by taking thought, to discover the reason for his vague anxieties. But, viewed rationally, they seemed absurd. He attempted to dismiss them.

He was happy. And Rose-Ann, in her own restless fashion, was happy, too. What could the future bring to disturb their happiness? Nothing!

His economic status, moreover, even upon Clive's calculations, was secure for another year at least. And he was writing again, this time to please himself. Rose-Ann should have no cause for complaint upon that score. . . .

And yet the vague anxieties persisted in the background of his thoughts.

It was as though he had in some way lost confidence in Rose-Ann.

He told himself that it was only that he knew her better now. He had been foolish to assume that he could trust utterly in her instincts for guidance. She was, like him, a bewildered wanderer, not knowing the right path. She was more like himself than he had ever dreamed.

He could not rely blindly upon her. He must decide things for himself.

It made him feel a little lonely, a little frightened—as one might feel in the woods, discovering that one's guide is a romantic ignoramus like oneself!

2

That was one reason why he did not want to show Rose-Ann the new play upon which he was working. It would

have pleased her—perhaps all too well! In this play, a variation upon the familiar triangle situation, the heroine kept her husband because she was not afraid to lose him. . . .

Yes, that would have pleased Rose-Ann. Then why did Felix feel absurdly guilty of some kind of spiritual disloyalty to her in writing it?

He did not quite know; but it was true that when Rose-Ann was in the studio he could not with any freedom work on that play. . . .

Rose-Ann felt this, and presently suggested that he try the experiment of working in a rented room somewhere not too far from the studio. He was surprised to find that in talking with Rose-Ann he indignantly repelled the idea as totally objectionable. He was absurdly angry at her for suggesting it.

It would have been intolerable if Rose-Ann had been jealous of his writing; and yet he was behaving as though she *ought* to be jealous of it. . . . A strange quirk of the imagination!

Was he disappointed in her for not being the mentor and guide he had tried to believe her—angry at her for insisting upon his finding his own pathway through the woods?

3

When Rose-Ann brought up for a second time the subject of a work-room, Felix admitted that it might be worth considering. And that same day he went out room-hunting. He had not admitted to himself that he really wanted such a place—but when, in a house on Garfield Boulevard, he found a little room with a table and a cot, he decided that he must have it. He told the landlady he would probably need it only a short time, and paid two weeks' rent, with the option of renewal. . . .

He did not want to tell Rose-Ann about it. He said to himself that he wanted to wait until he found whether he liked it or not. And he did wait until he had spent an afternoon there writing, before telling her.

It was curious, the feeling of being in a room of his own that nobody in the world knew about, not even Rose-Ann! That afternoon he seemed to throw off some impalpable burden. He felt—free! He could sit there and write, or dream, as long as he wished, with nobody to call him to account for the way he spent his time. Not that Rose-Ann ever did call him to account in such a manner; it was the last thing in the world she would ever have done. But now, as never since his marriage, he felt utterly by himself. . . . He sat dreaming for a while, and then commenced to write swiftly a little play, something he had not thought of at all before, a light, bright, rather cynical and pretty little play that seemed to flow out by its own energy—a play dealing with characters as unreal as those of Congreve or Wycherly, inhabitants of the same polite and witty realm of the imagination as Millamant and Mirabell.

He told Rose-Ann that he had rented a room, but not that he had written a play—for it was a short one-act affair of twenty pages, which he had practically completed at a sitting. He took an inward satisfaction in this harmless secret; and he was pleased that Rose-Ann did not ask exactly where his room was, but only congratulated him on being so sensible.

4

It was only a few days later that Rose-Ann came home with the news that she had carried out her long cherished intention of getting a job. She had learned by accident that there was an opening in a moving-picture magazine. She had gone there, made an impression, and been engaged as assistant editor.

Felix had a guilty sense that his desertion of their studio, if only for an occasional afternoon, had been responsible for her action. Certainly he was no longer in a position to oppose her wishes in this matter. His plea had been that a job would deprive him of her society. He had—though, it is true, at her suggestion—entered into an arrangement which threatened to deprive her of much of

his society. But, if there was any spirit of retaliation behind her decision, it was not apparent from her manner.

She was delighted with the new scope that this work gave her superabundant energies; and though it consisted chiefly of rewriting illiterate press-agentish articles, it yielded her a renewed sense of self-respect. And after observing, a little uneasily, for a week or two, its effect upon her, he found himself rather pleased.

Her office hours, though fixed, were not arduous. And if they had less time to spend together, that time had come to seem more precious. . . . They would be sitting together at breakfast in their studio, Rose-Ann in a flame-colored silk kimono that matched her curls, pouring coffee for him; all the more delightfully his, because he realized that when the occasion had been prolonged another five minutes, she would glance at the clock, and run behind the screen, to emerge dressed for her day's work—no longer his, but belonging to some impersonal enterprise for which he cared less than nothing. . . .

They would meet again at luncheon at the little Hungarian restaurant. Clive would be there. And the fact that they were all three of them snatching this hour of golden talk and comradeship from the midst of a working day, gave a special zest to the occasion. . . . They were, it seemed, happier than ever before.

"I've always something I can do for my old magazine in the evening," said Rose-Ann. "I won't be lonely. Why don't you go to your work-room?"

Two or three evenings a week he took her at her word, and in those solitary hours it seemed to him that his creative fancy had begun to bloom again.

XLII. An Apparition

I

HE had occupied the room on odd afternoons and evenings for a month, when a strange encounter occurred—if seeing somebody could be called an encounter.

It was a warm evening early in April, when he did not feel in the least like working. . . .

And besides, he had been looking over the three little one-act plays which were the fruit of his month's work, and they seemed to him trivial and silly; if this was all he could do, he had better stop trying to write plays. He was glad he had not shown them to Rose-Ann. They were caricatures of life—not without some grace, touched with a queer, decadent, heartless beauty, but essentially worthless. Why should he write things like that? One's work was a reflection of one's mind, of one's life, critics said. If he had judged those plays as a critic, he would have drawn from them certain inevitable implications with respect to the author's philosophy and mode of life; they were apparently the work of a man who did not believe in anything, and who found in reality no true satisfactions—otherwise why should he turn to this unreal realm of modernized Pierrots and Columbines for solace?

Pondering this enigma, he sat in the open window and looked out on the street. And in the distance he saw a figure that he knew—a girl.

It was Phyllis, the girl who had been at their wedding. She was coming toward him, and he recognized her with certainty despite the fact that he had seen her only once before in his life.

She was coming down the street, on the opposite side;

at the corner, she crossed over, coming toward the house where Felix was sitting perched in his third story window. She came straight to the front door of that very building, and then, after the slightest interval, Felix heard the door slam. She had entered the house.

Felix concluded that he must have been mistaken as to her identity. It was somebody else who looked like Phyllis—that was all. Phyllis was still at the Teachers' Institute; Clive had spoken only the other day of receiving a letter from her. But—

He listened; some one was coming up the second stairway. Was it she? And if so, what in the world was she doing here? It was too late to be calling on any one; besides, she had not rung the bell; she had entered, as if she belonged here. If it were Phyllis, she must be living in this house. And that was impossible.

Felix, listening at the door, heard the person, whoever it was, cross the hall—and it seemed to him that she had stopped at his door. But no—there was a jingling of keys, and he realized that the room next to his own was being unlocked. He opened his door quietly—uncertain now if he would be able to recognize Phyllis, and anxious not to make any foolish mistake. She was standing at the door, with her back to him, turning the key in the lock.

Of course it was Phyllis!

But if he were so certain, why didn't he speak to her? He was so close that he could have touched her. Why did he let her go without a word? . . . She went in, and he stood staring foolishly at the closed door.

It was Phyllis, without the slightest doubt. . . . And yet—it would be awkward to knock at a young woman's door at midnight and, if she turned out to be the wrong person, stammer out a lame and unconvincing apology. Why, she was probably some one whom he had seen, in his unseeing way, on the stairs a dozen times, some one who had seen him so often that his explanation of mistaken identity would sound very hollow indeed. . . .

2

The next evening, coming to his room, he heard the girl moving about in hers.

He had decided, with that part of his mind which dealt with questions of practical fact, that she was not really Phyllis. He had not mentioned his queer notion about her to Rose-Ann. But if it pleased him to think his neighbour was Phyllis, why shouldn't he?

It did please him; and in some odd way helped him in his work. She seemed to bring with her into his place of dreams some breath of sane and kindly reality. Her unseen presence there in the next room took some of the fever out of his strange dramatic fantasies, made them more human. He wrote more easily, with greater zest; and in the intervals of his writing it was comforting to hear her movements, her mere steps across the floor, the sound of paper rustling in her hands, and sometimes the bubbling of coffee over an alcohol lamp.

When she made the coffee the pungent fumes of it found their way through the locked door which separated his room from hers. . . . He smiled, thinking how startled she would be if he should knock on that door, and demand a cup of coffee. . . . At this point he had to remind himself that it was not really Phyllis there on the other side of that door.

3

But it really was Phyllis!—that was the strange thing about the whole affair. . . . Clive had at last confided to him that Phyllis was in town, but told him nothing more; it was Rose-Ann who told him that Phyllis had come to Chicago, unknown to Clive, and got herself a job, before letting him know anything of her plans.

"He's finding her quite too much for him," said Rose-Ann.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean—she's been his pupil, as it were, all along. Now she's demonstrating her independence."

"Where is she living?" he asked, and when Rose-Ann

said she didn't know, he told her of the girl he had seen who looked like Phyllis.

"Why didn't you speak to her and find out?" she asked impatiently.

"Why, I thought it must be a mistake," he said awkwardly.

"You really don't care anything about people at all, do you, Felix?" she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true. You're interested only in ideas. A girl who was at your wedding comes and lives in the same house with you, and you never even speak to her! You are a strange creature, Felix. For heaven's sake, knock at her door, and bring her around to see us. Just because she wants to be queer and not see anybody is no reason why we shouldn't be friendly."

4

Yes, it was Phyllis; he saw her again, late that night, from the window, plainly revealed by the glare of an arc-light, walking with Clive along the street toward the house; he had an impulse to shout to them, but he refrained, and only looked on while they came slowly over, and stood talking in front of the door. It was Phyllis, but she had changed; or was it only some constraint in her manner? No wonder he had not been certain of her identity. She had a different air; all the quietness was gone from her—she seemed the embodiment of a defiant restlessness. There was a reckless impudence in the whole pose of her body, the tilt of her head as she stood talking to Clive, in the very gesture of her arm as she held out her hand to Clive in good-bye. . . . Clive went abruptly; she was entering.

Felix could hear her running up the stairs. He ought to go out and speak to her. But he did not want to. He had a sense of her having changed, being a new and different person that he did not like. He wanted to keep the companionship of the Phyllis whom he had known these past weeks in imagination—he did not want for a neighbour this restless

girl whom she had become in actuality. He heard her unlock her door, and enter; and he said to himself that his refuge was spoiled—he would have to find another place to work in. . . .

It was true, what Rose-Ann had said; he cared nothing for people—only for ideas . . . and dreams. He cared for his dream of Phyllis. He was sorry to lose that.

Well—he would have to see her.

He heard her walking restlessly up and down her room; her light firm step sounded clearly through the door which separated their two rooms. She paused, walked the length of the room, and paused again. She was standing just on the other side of that door. . . .

He went over to that door and knocked.

XLIII. Nocturne

I

THE next moment he called himself a fool for going about it in this way; but he might as well go through with it now. He knocked again, more loudly, and called out her name, cheerfully. "Phyllis?"

"Who is it?" she asked, in a startled, questioning voice.

He called his own name. "I've just discovered we are fellow-lodgers!" he added. "Can I see you?"

She fumbled with the lock, and opened the door. She had just taken off her hat and coat, and she was wearing a black dress that made her seem pale. She looked older; her face was not so untroubledly serene as he had remembered it. But the sight of her gave him just such a momentary unreasonable panic as on that winter night when Clive had brought her into the room at Woods Point. She seemed again the impossible person of his secret dreams. . . . And then the illusion vanished. She was only—Clive's girl-problem.

"What are you doing here?"

They both asked the question of each other at once, and then both laughed. "You first," said Phyllis.

"I'm using this as a work-room occasionally," he explained.

"Really!" She looked past him into his room. "Right next to mine. How odd! . . . You and Rose-Ann haven't separated or anything, have you?"

"Why, no!" he laughed. "Why should you think—?"

"It's absurd, isn't it? But that was what came into my head. I'm glad it isn't so. . . . You work there? I see!"

"And you?" he demanded.

"Me? I've run away at last!"

"I heard something about it. . . ."

"Yes, run away—from school—from home—from everything! And come to Chicago to make my living. Even Clive didn't know. I've been here three weeks, and I've a real job. Not much of a one; just working on a trade-journal. It pays for this room, and my meals—and I'm glad I've taken the plunge. . . . Isn't it curious, our being neighbours like this! . . . But come in!"

They were still standing there, one on each side of the doorsill. He entered, and looked about her room. It was almost as bare as his own, but larger. A cot, with her coat and hat tossed upon it, a bureau, a writing table, an old trunk, and two chairs, both of them much repaired and one of them still rickety, were its furnishings.

"Not much to look at, is it?" she said. "But wait! Some day I shall have a grand studio like yours!" She sat down on the cot, and motioned him to draw up the less rickety chair. "The first day I was in town I slunk past your studio and peeped in. Some one was going out the door, and I got a glimpse of the inside."

"Why in the world didn't you come in and see us?"

"I don't know. . . . I thought perhaps you wouldn't remember me. And besides, I wanted to get established before I let any of my friends know—even Clive. I wanted to prove that I could do something by myself." A curious smile lit her face as she added: "It annoys Clive that I should have got a job without his help!"

"But why?" he wondered. He remembered what Clive had once said about the "battle" between himself and Phyllis. It had seemed absurd at the time. . . .

She did not reply, and so he asked: "Why shouldn't you be willing to be helped by your friends?"

"Well—one sometimes isn't," she said defensively.

All at once he felt the pathetic helplessness behind her masquerade of independence. And, moved by an odd impulse, he wanted to make her admit the truth to him.

"Is it just because it's Clive?" he asked.

For a moment she looked at him coldly as if about to

rebuke his presumption, and then looked down and said: "I suppose so. . . ."

"I thought you were in love with him," he said bluntly.

She laughed.

"But aren't you?" he insisted.

"What a question!" she retorted. "Are I or aren't I? You talk like my mother! . . . How do I know?"

"And you talk like Clive!" he said.

"Probably I learned it from him. . . . I've learned 'most everything I know from him."

"You're an odd girl," he told her.

"So Clive says. . . . You're very like Clive yourself, do you know?"

"I wish I were more like him, in some ways; but in other respects—"

"Yes—you're very much like him. Only—more so!"

"What do you mean? You rather alarm me."

"Oh, you needn't be alarmed. My meaning is very flattering. I think a lot of Clive!"

"Then why do you run away from him?" Felix demanded.

"Is coming to Chicago running away from him?"

"He wanted you to come to Chicago three years ago—didn't he?"

"Yes, but— Oh, it's very involved. Are you really interested? I'm not sure that I understand it myself."

He was quite sure that she wanted to tell him the whole story. And he wanted to hear it.

"I'm very much interested," he said. "And perhaps," he hazarded, "—perhaps I could help you to understand."

"I wish you could. . . . I don't know where to begin."

Yes—she did want to tell him. And it would be interesting to know the truth about Clive and Phyllis—at last!

"Begin with yourself—before Clive came along," he commanded.

"Oh—you think he changed me?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well—perhaps. Oh, of course I was a romantic little

goose before he came along. And yet—that isn't so, either. . . . I was hard-headed, in a way. It was I who made my father go into the taxi business and save the family from complete poverty. I did know some things—better than my father."

"I've wondered about your folks," he said. "Tell me about your father."

"He wanted to be a farmer. He wanted to go out west and take up government land, but he didn't have the nerve. And his own farm was no good. He slaved himself on it year after year and was always in debt. Then he quit and took a job on the railroad. But he doesn't like machinery; curious, he'd rather dig in the ground than anything else in the world. But what was the use? We actually didn't have enough money to buy shoes. I quit school and clerked in Wilson's store, so I could have decent clothes. And I sewed for my sisters, so as not to be ashamed of the way they looked. I used to hate my father—and my mother, too, for never complaining, for always putting up with things. 'Your father is a good man, Phyllis,' she would say. 'He doesn't drink, or play cards, and he's never used an unkind word to me or you children. And he's terribly patient.' That's it—he was so *terribly* patient! If he'd been a drunkard, there might have been some excuse. . . . Tell me —does all this bore you?"

"No, it doesn't bore me. Go on."

"I wanted to be a teacher. . . . Clive thinks I went off to become a teacher just to spite him. But it was an old ambition of mine. I wanted to put the family on its feet—and I wanted to do something that had to do with books. It's silly, isn't it? But teaching was all I could think of. Only, how was I to do it? I kept up with the school studies at home, nights, besides helping mother with the house and making clothes for Bess and Emmy. I got one of the teachers to bring me a copy of the final examination questions, and I wrote out my answers at home. I did it fairly, too—and he marked them for me."

"Who was 'he'?"

"The teacher, Mr. Andrews—the science teacher. He was all right. He lent me books, and talked to me."

Felix smiled to himself. So Clive Bangs had not been the only one who had lent books and talked to Phyllis! He had only been the latest one to minister to an insatiable hunger for new knowledge. He had not, as he so egotistically thought, changed the current of her life; or perhaps he had: Phyllis' story would show. But already it was a different personality from any suggested by Clive's remarks or Felix's own dreaming, that began to appear.

"Only—how was I ever to get to school? There were no boys in the family—I often felt as though I were the man of the family—I had to raise some money myself. . . . At last I thought of the taxi idea. I talked father into it. . . . It was the hardest battle I ever had."

"How old were you then?"

"Sixteen. . . . You mustn't think my father was a—a bad father. I really loved him very much. He wanted to take care of his family, but he just didn't know how. I had to take things into my own hands. I persuaded him to borrow the money for our first car. That year we paid for it, and I made him borrow the money to buy another, and let me run it. Well—we made lots of money, and now we've five cars—so that's all right. . . . I don't know why I got off the track and told you all this stuff. You wanted to know about me and Clive."

"Yes, then Clive came along?"

"He had been there all the time—only he never saw me. Why should he? I don't think he ever would have seen me, if one night when I was driving him home I hadn't noticed that he was carrying an interesting-looking book with a white label. I glanced at it rather obviously. He held it up, and asked me if I had ever read any of Bernard Shaw's plays. I was scared to death—I had wanted to talk to him for two years, and here was my chance. I had to make good. Of course, I'd never read anything of Shaw's, but what did that matter? It was my chance to prove to

him that I was worth talking to. So I swallowed hard, and said, yes, I'd read everything I could find of Shaw's. I knew if he asked me any questions, I could say, no, I hadn't been able to get hold of that yet. . . . Well, it worked. And that night—the library was closed, but I knew the librarian and I made him go there with me and open it up long enough for me to get the only two volumes of Shaw the library had. I read one of them that night and the other the next day. I liked them, too, though they did seem a little queer to me at the very first. . . ."

"What were they?" Felix asked.

"The 'Three Plays for Puritans,' and 'Man and Superman.' I read them all, prefaces, appendixes and everything. I said, if these are the things he likes, I can like them too, and I will! I got a liberal education out of those two books. I was a different person when I saw him three days later and he lent me 'Cashel Byron's Profession.' . . . And yet I wasn't, either. I told you that I was a romantic little goose. . . . If there's one thing I have learned, it's—not to be ashamed to tell anything. So I don't mind telling you what a little fool I was. Think! I had just stocked my brain full of Bernard Shaw, and yet—it *is* hard to tell—I was carrying on a romantic fairy-tale at the same time, with Clive as the hero-prince! I thought—in spite of everything, you see, I was only a silly girl—that he wanted to marry me. I even commenced secretly to sew things, to get my clothes ready for the wedding. . . . And at the same time—It's queer—but I think I should have despised him if he *had* wanted to marry me! . . . My mother warned me against him. Poor dear father, he didn't even know what was going on. But mother was very much worried. Well! she needn't have been. She was just as much mistaken about Clive's intentions as I was! All he wanted was to modernize me. Heavens! the trouble we took, the stealthy meetings, the secret rendezvous—to discuss the Life Force! It's really funny!"

"I don't think it's so funny," Felix said soberly.

"No," said Phyllis, "the worst of it is, he did modernize

me. I don't know why I should complain—but somehow I resent his power over me. He's always told me what to do; and in the end I've always done it. But I've hated to. He told me to go to Chicago three years ago. He told me that what I needed was work, and adventure, and love. And yet, for three years I tried to work out some silly plan of my own. I didn't want to admit that he was right."

"Are you sure that he *is* right?" Felix asked.

"Of course? Aren't you? Work—adventure—love? Why not? This is the twentieth century—and I'm twenty-two years old. Why shouldn't I have all those things?"

"No reason—if you really want them. But—"

"Yes?"

"Well—"

"You aren't going to tell me that woman's place is in the home, and that I ought to get married? That would sound strange, coming from you!"

"Why? I am married."

"Yes. . . . You're lucky," she said looking at him, sombrely.

"I know I am. But what do you mean?"

"Your marriage. You're *living* your theories."

Felix smiled. "What theories do you mean? You didn't take seriously everything Clive said at our wedding, did you?"

She looked at him earnestly. "Clive wrote me you *were* living up to your theories—you and Rose-Ann. Isn't it true?"

"Oh—that."

He knew that she meant the Dorothy episode. Rose-Ann had told Clive about it, and Clive had used the anecdote more than once to point a modernistic moral. Phyllis was not the only young person who had heard strange tales of this wonderful "free" marriage.

Phyllis's eyes questioned him fiercely, anxiously.

"I see you've heard the story," he said. "Well, something of that sort did happen. But—"

"So it's true!" She said it triumphantly. "I'm so tired

of all this talk that never gets anywhere. You don't know how much you and Rose-Ann have meant to me—your marriage. It convinced me that there was something to modernism after all."

"So you doubted it—in spite of all Clive's talk?"

"Yes—I did. Because it was *just* talk. . . . Look at me! Do you doubt that I wanted everything Clive told me about? work—adventure—love. . . . I've wanted them all along. If Clive had only said, 'Come with me to Chicago—'!"

"What *did* he say?"

"He left it to me to decide. . . . That was fair enough. If I didn't have sense enough to decide by myself—. Only, I think he should have dropped me, let me alone. He's been too patient. I've lost my respect for him."

"What do you want him to do—*make* you marry him?"

"Not now. Three years ago I was foolish enough to believe in marriage. I couldn't marry anybody now—least of all Clive: the man who taught me not to believe in marriage!"

"But you believe in—Rose-Ann's and my marriage, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!" There was a wealth of devoutness in her utterance, and her eyes opened wide as if in astonishment at her belief being questioned. "Of course. But that's different. . . . You two," she said, a little sadly, "are the only people in the world that I do believe in,—you and Rose-Ann. If *you* went back on me, and I felt that I was making a mistake in becoming a modern woman, why—" She laughed, and added, "No doubt my modernism seems ridiculous to you. I admit that it's only talk, so far! I—why, I don't even smoke cigarettes. Clive has been to immense pains to educate my mind; but my habits are still those of—of my middle-western childhood. It's going to be strange. . . . I *am* a queer person. Restless, discontented, fed up on radical theories for three years. . . . Do I seem ridiculous to you?"

"No," Felix said gravely. "Not ridiculous." He hes-

itated. . . . There were things he wanted to say to her; but *he* would be ridiculous, saying those things. And yet he did want to say them. . . . Her hand lay near him on the couch. He covered it with his own. The touch gave him the encouragement he needed; but when he spoke it was in unpremeditated words.

"I'm awfully sorry, Phyllis," he said.

2

For a moment her flippant hardness disappeared. She became for a moment, in response to his tone, the girl he had first known—the real person, simple and genuine, that still underlay all her pretences. . . . She let her hand rest in his for a moment, and then withdrew it. "Why sorry?" she asked quietly. "I'm sorry for myself; but why should you be sorry for me, Felix?"

"I don't know," Felix said. "But—I like you, and I want you to be happy. And Clive's modernism doesn't seem to me to be what you want."

She frowned at him. "What *do* I want?" she asked.

"Not a hectic, experimental kind of existence," he said.

"I don't?"

"No. Not for yourself. You may want to be that sort of person to please Clive. But *you* don't want it. You want—I'll tell you what you want." He spoke confidently. "It's very simple. You want a husband, and children, and a home, and you want to stay there—you want to be *made* to stay there."

She stirred restlessly, and seemed about to speak, but he motioned her abruptly to keep still, and went on authoritatively. "Oh, don't deny it. You want somebody to take you in charge—some one in whom you really believe, that you can really depend upon, somebody who can boss the job. Don't you!" he finished rather imperiously.

She smiled at him quizzically, and then said, "Yes. Maybe I do. How did you guess?"

"I knew," he said.

"Well, don't tell anybody that I'm such a ridiculous

person!" she said. And suddenly she slipped down from the bed to the floor, and put her arm across his knees, and laid her head against it, without speaking. After a while she looked up, and asked timidly, "Do you mind? I wanted to."

2

Felix caressed her shoulder with his hand, lightly—feeling in some queer way that she was a child and that he was some infinitely older and wiser person.

They sat there a long time, she with her head resting against his knee, and he with his hand touching her shoulder. At last she took his other hand and held it against her face, with an apparently unconscious and instinctive gesture, as if she were in truth a child. He had a deep conviction that this was not love-making in any ordinary sense. There was some blessed healing in these contacts for them both—that was all.

Yes—for him, too. For as he bent over her, with his hand nourished against her cheek, he seemed to be finding rest, finding some quiet peace which his spirit needed. This touch was enough. It was balm for a weariness of which he had not been aware. It was rest, it was peace, it was his dream of her come true.

She lifted her head at last, like some one who has waked from a refreshing sleep. "You are very good to me," she said, and rose up.

He stood up, suddenly conscious of how long they had been together, and wondered what time it was.

She glanced at her clock on the mantel, and his look followed hers. It was three o'clock.

"Gracious!" she whispered.

He started to walk across the floor, and a board creaked; he finished the journey to his door on tiptoe, half ashamed and angry at taking such a precaution. It gave an air of the illicit to the occasion. At the door he turned.

She had remained standing beside his chair. He could not shake hands with her without going back. But why was he hurrying away in such a frightened manner, as if he had done something wrong? He recrossed the room and held out his hand.

"Good night, Phyllis."

"Good night, Felix Fay."

He walked boldly back to his own room, and closed the door with a defiant bang.

3

It had been very beautiful. . . . And why, now, must it be so awkward, the task of finding a place for this beauty in his ordinary life?

Explanations! . . .

Rose-Ann would understand, of course. But, even so, the telling of it was difficult. He could think of no words to convey the simplicity and naturalness of the incident.

It was all very well to talk of telling the truth to one's beloved; but the truth was not such an easy thing to tell! . . .

So Felix was reflecting, as he put on his coat and hat to go home, when there was a knock on the door he had banged shut, and Phyllis entered.

"I want a breath of fresh air," she said. "I'll walk over to your place with you if you don't mind."

XLIV. Aubade

I

"THERE'S a light burning in your studio," she said as they turned the corner. They had been silent all the way, Phyllis happy to be out in the moonlight, and Felix rather moodily uneasy at this prolongation of an incident that had already had its due ending.

"Yes, Rose-Ann is still up," he said.

He unlocked the door, and Phyllis ran in eagerly. Rose-Ann sprang up from the table where she had been working over some magazine proofs.

"Phyllis!" she cried, and the two girls embraced like old friends long parted.

"I've been keeping Felix up, listening to the story of my life," said Phyllis.

"Is it late? I've been fixing up the dummy of the Motion Picture World. I'm just finished. I have to get it down at the printer's at eight in the morning." She went over to the table, and swept the scattered proofs into a portfolio, laying the dummy upon them, and tying the strings. "How about some coffee? Or are you sleepy?"

"Wide awake!" said Phyllis. "It's so nice to find you up. I did want to see your studio."

"Felix, will you make some coffee?"

Felix came back in a moment and sadly reported that the coffee was "all gone!"

"Oh, I forgot—I used the last of it this evening. . . . What a pity!"

Felix, returning into their presence from behind the screen, had a curious sense of being a third, an intruder into a friendly intimacy. He had had, in the very moment of their meeting, a startled impression of their being the oldest friends each other had, far more deeply acquainted

with each other than he with either of them! And now, in the mere two minutes in which he had been out of their sight searching for coffee, they had begun to talk for all the world like two old schoolmates who had, after a long separation, much to tell each other. His entrance had, or so it seemed to him, the effect of an interruption.

"I'll look again," he said awkwardly. "There may be some left of that G. Washington coffee. I think there is." And he went behind the screen again.

There was no "G. Washington coffee." He found the empty can at once. But he sat down on the bed, grinning sheepishly at himself, instead of returning. He could hear them out there talking in the swift, breathless, low tones of confidential feminine narrative. Now Phyllis's voice ceased on a note of inquiry, and Rose-Ann spoke without interruption to a hushed listener. Her voice became louder, and there was a ring of pride in it. Both girls suddenly laughed and then Rose-Ann went on talking. . . .

What on earth could they be talking about? Felix found himself listening curiously, with decidedly the feeling of an eavesdropper, but he could distinguish only an unrevealing word or two now and then. "Clive's house," he heard, and after a while, "scissors," followed by another laugh; but that was all.

If someone had assured him, beforehand, that Rose-Ann, in spite of what had seemed to him an ungenerous hostility to Phyllis, would have instantly taken her to her bosom like this, he would have been pleased; but now, with that fact before him, he was not so much pleased as astonished. He was even a little annoyed.

Why should he be annoyed? It was doubtless natural enough for these two girls to want to talk together. Phyllis's having been at Rose-Ann's wedding constituted a bond between them. . . . And Felix remembered that when they had first met they had seemed to like each other at once. He was behaving rather ridiculously in staying out here; they could talk just as well in his presence.

He returned to them and again reported failure. And

once more, as he entered, he had the feeling of being an intruder. This time it was as if they had forgotten his existence, and were rather startled to find him there, and puzzled for a moment to know how to get rid of him!

"Oh!" said Rose-Ann to his news of the total absence of any coffee whatever.

"I've some coffee over at my place," said Phyllis. "Won't you come over there? I'd like to show you my room. And we can talk."

Distinctly her glance at him told Felix that he was not wanted along.

Rose-Ann jumped up. "Let's!" she said. And then to Felix, "you needn't bother to come with us. Phyllis and I want to talk."

"All right!" he said, smiling. But as he saw them depart together out of the door of the studio into the moonlight, he had an odd feeling of being a little boy left out of the conversation of his elders. . . . And perhaps, too, there was a strange feeling of jealous unease.

2

He took a book, went to bed, and tried to read himself to sleep. But at six o'clock he was still awake, and Rose-Ann had not returned. At seven he rose, and went—well, perhaps not exactly to look for her, but to his workroom.

Through the inner door he could hear their voices, in animated conversation. He went to the door, flung it open, and cried,

"My God, are you girls still talking!"

They looked up, startled, and then laughed. "What time is it?" asked Rose-Ann. "I've been telling Phyllis the history of our marriage. . . . "

So that was what they were talking about! Half-appeased, at having been after all included in the conversation, he looked at his watch. "Seven-thirty," he said.

"I have to have my dummy at the printer's at eight," said Rose-Ann. "I wonder if you will take it there for

me, Felix, while I take a bath. And we'll all meet at breakfast. Clive and Phyllis are going to have breakfast at Henrici's, and we'll join them. Will you?"

Felix went back to the studio for the dummy. As he went, he carried in his mind the picture he had seen when he opened the door of Phyllis's room—Phyllis sitting on the floor at Rose-Ann's feet precisely as a few hours earlier she had sat at his, with what must have been the same worshipful expression on her face as she listened to Rose-Ann's words. Rose-Ann had also probably been deciding her young destinies for her.

Felix laughed. It was certainly odd enough!

Yes, but what ideas had Rose-Ann been putting into her head? What kind of story had Rose-Ann told her about their marriage? Had Rose-Ann talked about their mutual "freedom"? That theme would have accounted for Phyllis's rapt and devout attention. It was what Phyllis wanted to hear, what she wanted to believe—that love could be like that!

Anyway, he was glad that Phyllis and Rose-Ann were friends.

2

The four of them breakfasted together at Henrici's, and at noon Phyllis was inducted into the magic circle of their mid-day comradeship at the corner table in the little Hungarian restaurant; and that afternoon they took the train for Woods Point—whither Phyllis had to go as it were in disguise, or at least stealthily, for her family must not know that she was spending the night at Clive's: an ironic precaution, for their relations were still as vexatiously and chastely intellectual as they had been in the earliest days of their clandestine meetings.

In spite of their need of sleep—and fortified by the thought that tomorrow was Sunday and they could sleep as long as they liked—they sat up until all hours, talking. It was like a reunion, and the memory of their first meeting here touched it with romantic suggestion. The promise

of comradeship which had been implicit in that first meeting, obscured at the time by the anxieties and discomforts of a tribal ceremonial, had now, after so long an interval, come true. They felt that they had discovered each other, to a new extent, in this new grouping. It is not often that two couples can happily coalesce into that infinitely fluid and various arrangement, a group of four. But it had quite unmistakably and thrillingly happened!

XLV. Foursome

I

THE conversational permutations and combinations of this new fourfold intimacy inevitably threw new light for each upon the character of the others, and led to endless discussions.

"But why," Felix exclaimed to Rose-Ann, after an evening spent in the company of the two others, "doesn't Phyllis make up her mind about Clive, one way or the other. Why should she keep on tormenting him this way?"

"Why doesn't Clive make up his own mind?" Rose-Ann retorted. "It's he that's torturing her. I understand Phyllis's attitude perfectly."

"We both seem to have rather changed our views about them," he observed. "You used to blame Phyllis."

"I don't any more," said Rose-Ann. "I blame Clive."

"For what, precisely?"

"For not knowing what he wants!"

"He wants Phyllis. That's simple enough."

"No, he doesn't. It would be simple enough if he did. He could have her in a moment. She's crazy about him. She wants nothing else than to be really his sweetheart."

"Then why isn't she?"

"Because he won't let her!"

"What nonsense, Rose-Ann!"

"It's perfectly true. I was going to tell you; while you and Clive were over in the corner tonight talking about that novel of his, she was explaining to me what she was angry at him about. She had proposed to him that they rent an apartment together in Chicago this fall."

"And he refused?" Felix asked incredulously.

"Yes . . . unless she would marry him first. And she wouldn't."

"But why not?" he asked.

"Don't you understand, Felix? . . . Before, when they first knew each other, she would gladly have married him—but he wouldn't ask her. He wanted her to be a 'free-woman.' And now that she's ready to be, he insists on 'protecting' her with a marriage. Can't you see? he wants her to admit that she's not in earnest, that she's afraid. . . . And she won't. I quite agree with her!"

"But what a fuss over nothing," said Felix.

"Over nothing? Aren't ideas anything? Isn't pride anything?"

"Not in comparison with happiness. They've been making each other miserable for two years with their ideas, and their silly pride. The important thing is to get them—yes, damn it!—into the same bed together!"

Rose-Ann laughed. "They've tried even that, Felix! and it did no good."

"What!"

"No— they spent the night arguing about whether they really loved each other!"

Felix groaned. "I never heard of such a crazy pair in my life!"

"Yes, it was utterly ridiculous," Rose-Ann agreed. "Phyllis told Clive she was perfectly willing, for the sake of companionship, to become his mistress—but he wouldn't have her on those terms. He wanted her to say she loved him."

"I can't exactly blame him for asking that," said Felix. "Why shouldn't she say it?—it was true!"

"She just wasn't sure; I can understand that, Felix. She wanted to find out whether she did or not. And if he couldn't be sure for both of them— You see, it was his cowardice, not hers."

"Madness!" said Felix. "Is this what modern love has come to!"

2

Again, Clive and Felix were at the "Tavern," across the street from the Chronicle, sitting in front of their afternoon ale.

"Phyllis," said Clive, "talks about nothing but you, nowadays—you and Rose-Ann. I gather that you are the most wonderful two people in the world, with the possible exception of Bernard Shaw and Ellen Key."

"I hear much more extravagant reports than that about myself," said Felix. "Bernard Shaw isn't in it. I gather that I am almost as wonderful a person as Clive Bangs!"

Clive shook his head. "I am a deserted altar," he declared, with mock mournfulness. "You are the new divinity. How does it feel?"

"It's—slightly embarrassing sometimes," said Felix.

Clive grinned. "You just hate it, don't you? It makes you bored to be adored!"

"Not exactly," said Felix. "But Phyllis does have a disturbing way, when we are alone together, of seeming to be a—well, a child, a very young child with a . . . a beloved parent!"

"Or why not say, a worshipper in the presence of a god!" Clive laughed. "You find it embarrassing, do you?"

"And also agreeable in a curious way!" Felix confessed. "I've never been regarded as a supernaturally wise being, before. I find I rather like it!"

"I know," said Clive. "The truth, is, it's tremendously gratifying to one's egotism. It's nice to be a god. But I fell off my pedestal early in the game. And what I'd like to know is, how do you manage to stay on yours so serenely?"

"It comes naturally to me, to be a god, I expect," said Felix modestly. "I was probably born that way. I've often been told I'm not human. But I imagine the trouble with you was that you made love to her. That was a mistake. You should let her make love to you."

"It sounds all right, Felix—not to make love to her: but do you really find it so terribly easy?"

"Oh," said Felix, "I just keep in mind that I am supposed to be calm, benignant, Olympian intelligence! And really, you know, there's nothing in the world less conducive to romance. A gesture betraying anything more than a condescending paternal affection would shatter the picture. An importunate lover is merely human, you know, Clive!"

"So I've found!' said Clive.

"But it's your own damned fault. I mean this seriously, Clive. You taught her this preposterous evasiveness. She's only learned your characteristic attitude—or your favourite trick, whichever it is."

"I must say she's learned it well. . . . So you think it's all a mask. And what do you imagine is underneath?" Clive asked carelessly.

"I don't imagine—I know," Felix said earnestly, thinking of the real person he had evoked from under her intellectual disguises that first night of talk in her room. "Something so simple, Clive, that you'd never believe it."

Clive yawned. "I might not believe it, but I can guess what you're about to say, Felix: a Woman, God bless her, with a capital W! . . . Come on, Felix, you've reached the maudlin stage; let's go back to the office."

3

"Phyllis," said Clive to Rose-Ann one afternoon at Field's where they had met by chance at the stationery counter, and had gone together to the tea-room for tea and talk, "complains to me that Felix hasn't been to his workroom all this week; she seems to think he is idling away his time in the society of his wife, when he ought to be writing plays and letting her make coffee for him."

Rose-Ann laughed. "Whether it's Phyllis's coffee or not, he does seem to be getting some good work done. I really like that new play."

"'The Dryad'? A lovely little thing. Why don't you make him send it to Gregory Storm?"

Gregory Storm was an enthusiast who was organizing a company of amateurs to give plays by Schnitzler and Wedekind and other moderns, and Felix had vainly been urged by Clive to submit some of his one-act plays to them.

"I'm not going to 'make' Felix do anything," Rose-Ann said impatiently. "Make him yourself, if you want him to! I *won't* manage his career for him."

"Afraid he'll blame you if it fails?" Clive asked maliciously.

"No—afraid he'll blame me if it succeeds!" she laughed.

"You're right," said Clive. "I never saw any one so afraid of success."

"Oh, it's not success he's afraid of. It's rather, I think, that he's afraid of enjoying himself! You know, Clive, he really is a Puritan!"

"Harsh words, Mrs. Fay! On what grounds do you accuse Felix of the horrid crime of Puritanism?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Clive! You were saying that Felix hadn't been to his work-room this week. And you know why. It's because he's afraid of Phyllis. Isn't it absurd!"

"Absurd? Not at all! I'm very much afraid of her, myself!"

"Well, I'm not! Felix ought to know that I'm just as fond of Phyllis as he is, and that I can perfectly well understand how nice it is to have her around. I like to have her make coffee for me, and sit at *my* feet. And suppose he did kiss her—she's very kissable; I wish he would, and get over being afraid of her."

"No use, Rose-Ann; he never will. And what's worse, she never will, either. She's just as much afraid of him as he is of her. I'm afraid theirs is a hopeless passion!"

They both commenced to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

4

Phyllis and Clive had quarrelled again, and Phyllis felt in need of encouragement in her Clive-less way of life. She

leaned on Rose-Ann for philosophic guidance, and the two girls spent many evenings together in the studio; while Felix, without the sustenance of Phyllis's coffee, worked at revising "The Dryad," which he had decided to submit to Gregory Storm. But one evening Phyllis came in disconsolately, and said to Felix:

"I've been to the studio and Rose-Ann isn't there!"

"She's at the printer's," said Felix, "reading page-proof." He pushed back his manuscript. "Do you want to make me some—"

"Coffee? No," said Phyllis, "but you can take me out and buy me a cocktail or something; and—and give me some spiritual guidance. I need it!"

They went to a quiet restaurant in the Loop which Clive had discovered, a foreign-looking place where people sat for hours over one drink: a place to talk. It was almost empty at this hour. A table across the room was occupied by an elderly Swede or Dane, who sat moodily sipping a liqueur.

"What," Phyllis demanded, fingering the stem of her glass, "*shall* I do—I mean, with my life. Tell me, Felix!"

"If I tell you, will you do it?" he demanded.

She hesitated for a moment. "Yes—I will!"

"Marry!"

"Oh—I might have known you would say that." She sipped her cocktail disappointedly. "I could have got that advice from St. Paul!"

"I suppose you prefer to take Walter Pater's advice," he said laughingly.

"What is that?"

"Burn always with a hard, gem-like flame! But, no—St. Paul is right: it is better to marry!"

"Don't tease me, Felix. I'm in earnest."

"So am I. I've told you what to do."

"Marry—yes. But why?"

"You'll find out why, my dear. 'Open your mouth and shut your eyes—'"

"You're making fun of me."

"Not a bit."

"Marry, you say?"

"Yes."

"And I'm not to ask why?"

"No."

"Then—whom?"

"A man."

"Any man?"

"Any man you happen to like."

"But I don't happen to like many men."

"Marry one of those fortunate few."

"I suppose you mean Clive?"

"He'll do."

"No, he won't."

"Why not?"

"He doesn't believe in marriage. And, Felix, one of the two people must believe in a marriage, for it to *be* a marriage!"

"Then marry—Herbert Bond."

Herbert Bond was a staid young business man with whom Phyllis had flirted outrageously during her last quarrel with Clive.

"You said—any man I happened to *like*," she protested.

"What kind of man *do* you happen to like, then?"

"Clive's kind!"

"I suspected as much," he said. "Well, then, marry one of Clive's kind—but without Clive's fatal weakness."

"Not believing in marriage—is that his fatal weakness?"

"Not being able to believe in anything!—in marriage—in love—"

"Or in me," said Phyllis sadly.

Felix was silent.

"Can any one—any one of Clive's kind—believe in me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"Are you sure?" she demanded, leaning across the table.

"Quite sure," he said quietly, meeting her gaze.

She looked down. "There's only one other man—of Clive's kind—that I can think of," she said. "And he's—out of my reach."

"Then you must look around for some others," Felix said, smiling.

"Are there others?" she asked incredulously.

"Of course. It's only youth and ignorance that makes you imagine they are scarce. You don't find them by the dozens in little country towns, of course; but you are in Chicago, now. They are a type familiar in all great cities. How long have you been here? A few months! And because you've only found two, so far—"

She sighed. "You think there may be a third?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you think I'll find him?"

"If you look."

"And will he like *me*, do you think?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if he did, rather!"

"Thank you!" she said mockingly. "It is awfully kind of you to say so!"

At this moment they noticed the man who was sitting across the room, the elderly Scandinavian, rising and bowing in their direction. They looked at him in surprise, and he came over to their table, and bowed again. He was drunk, but none the less a gentleman.

"Pardon me," he said, speaking quietly, in a voice which had only the trace of an alien accent, "for the liberty I take in addressing you. But I have been sitting there, seeing you—seeing your happiness—and it gave me such pleasure that I wanted to tell you—to thank you. Yes, to thank you!" He put his hand on his breast.

"I felt sure," he said, smiling affectionately at them, "—I said to myself, these two happy lovers will forgive a lonely old man for telling them how much it has meant only to look on for a moment at their happiness—their young happiness!"

He bowed again. "Pardon me," he said, smiling, and again bowed, and went out the door.

Felix and Phyllis stared after him, and then looked at each other, and burst out laughing.

5

But, interesting as such incidental discussions might be, the heart of their fourfold relationship was in the mid-day discussions at the little Hungarian restaurant. They named it the Rendezvous. There they talked of everything in the world that interested them. . . . Two people talking together tell secrets; three people talking are a conspiracy; but four talkers are a world. They told the truth; they were hard in their sincerity; and nobody flinched. They were proud of their robustness. The theme of a tête-a-tête confession might at any moment be flung into the stark publicity of that arena. They no longer had secrets; or, if they had, it was because these were secrets of which they had not become aware.

One day Clive said laughingly, "If anything ever happens to us, of the sort that 'can't' be discussed, we'll come here, and discuss it in the teeth of God and Nature!"

6

They had planned a vacation together, but Phyllis and Clive had quarrelled once more, and Felix and Rose-Ann set out disappointedly by themselves on the appointed day, through Gary and beyond to "the Dunes." But, after a little having pitched their tent and wandered out over the great wastes of sand by the Lake, they were conscious, both of them, of a sense of release. In this wilderness of sand-hills, they seemed to be a million miles distant from all the world they had lived in.

"It's good to be away from people," said Rose-Ann.

"Even from Clive and Phyllis," said Felix.

Rose-Ann's lips pouted mutinously. "*Especially* from Clive and Phyllis!" she said.

"Yes. . . ." Felix said hesitatingly. "But—why?"

"They're family all over again," said Rose-Ann. "I

thought I had escaped from families. . . . But one never does."

They cooked and ate and slept and kissed and bathed in the lake, and lay idly on the sand. They did not discuss anything all week long. And when the end came, and it was time to begin the miles-long walk back to the nearest street-car line, they stood looking back lingeringly at the peace they were leaving behind.

"It would be nice to have a house here," said Rose-Ann.

"Yes, . . ." said Felix.

"Only—the lake and the sand are sort of wasted, without children to enjoy them."

A burning flash of memory lighted Felix's mind, and he saw himself and Rose-Ann, the summer before, walking in a park under great trees that lifted their shivering glooms to the sky. . . . "Everything is all right now," she had said—now that they were to have no child. . . .

He felt, again, forces that he did not understand hurling themselves on his heart, crushing and stunning it. . . . He looked at her, questioning her with his eyes.

"I hope," she was saying, "that Clive and Phyllis make up again—soon. We *are* rather dull without them, aren't we?"

XLVI. The Rehearsal

1

COMING back to town, Felix forced himself to ask for another raise in salary. It was less because he needed the money than because he wanted to assure himself that he really was what he was supposed to be —a person of some importance. He got his raise—one which made his pay now commensurate with his position as dramatic critic of a great newspaper.

And the same week he received word that the Artists' Theatre had accepted his play, "The Dryad." It was to be presented on the opening bill, along with Schnitzler and Wedekind!

The acceptance of this play, taken in conjunction with such a realistic fact as his raise in salary, seemed to mean something; he wanted to believe that it did—but he was rather afraid to believe it. Instead, he began to tell himself that in sober truth it meant nothing at all.

He went to see Gregory Storm, the director, and was urged to attend the rehearsals. "At all events," he said to himself, "I can look on and learn something practical about the mechanics of the theatre."

2

Rose-Ann refused to accompany him to the rehearsal. "You are getting into a terrible habit of having me on your mind whenever I'm around," she said. "I've noticed it when you write; I bother you. I'd rather stay away. Besides, if I went, I should want to be in it myself!"

He went alone, reflecting that what Rose-Ann had said was true. If she were in the room he was more self-

conscious, by reason of being so conscious of her. He must get over it. . . .

He found the players assembled on their tiny stage, hardly larger than the one in the children's theatre at Community House. The house would seat ninety-nine people only; one more seat, and the Artists' Theatre would have come within the theatre ordinance and been required to pay a theatre-tax. Officially then, as a theatre, it did not exist. The actors, Felix knew, received no pay; they were lawyers and doctors, painters and poets, business men's wives and ambitious young women just out of school. The authors of the plays would receive no royalty; the income from seat-sales would not cover the rent of the theatre itself, and the deficit would have to be made up by enthusiasts. . . . In a manner of speaking, it wasn't a theatre at all—it was a dream.

As soon as he entered the theatre Felix felt its irresistible dream quality. Upon the stage, walking up and down, was the slight, striking, dramatic figure of Gregory Storm—the dreamer whose dream all this was, the man who still, in the years of maturity, was trying to achieve a childish, absurd and delightful impossibility. It was he who had named this enterprise "The Artists' Theatre"; no one else in Chicago would have been so brave, or so foolish. . . .

He turned, saw Felix, nodded at him, and clapped his hands. "Cast of 'The Dryad'!" he cried.

Three men and a girl stood up. The others left the stage. Felix clambered up over the place where the footlights would have been if Gregory Storm had not passionately disbelieved in footlights.

Gregory Storm shook Felix's hand hastily, and turned to the others. "This is the author, Mr. Fay. Miss Macklin, Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Whipple, Mr. Deedy." Felix bowed. "We'll have the scenery." He clapped his hands again. "Set for 'The Dryad'!"

A man whom Felix recognized as an enterprising young architect appeared at the back, struggling with a tall painted canvas frame. . . . As the set was put together, Felix felt

a genuine thrill of pleasure; it was so completely, and so startlingly, in the spirit of his play. He had feared that he would be given a realistic woodland setting—and that would have shown up the utter artifice of his play. But this was a wood as some artist of the Yellow Book in his gayest mood might have pictured it—a wood that was, after all, a fashionable drawing-room or a perfumed boudoir, set for the graceful and heartless loves of shepherds and shepherdesses dressed in silks and satins. . . . The young architect grinned at him. "Like it?" he whispered. "I did it myself. Pretty good, I think!"

"We had a good deal of difficulty with that little song in your play," said Gregory Storm. "The one the fat man sings." He smiled appreciatively. "We set it to two or three old ballad tunes before we got the right one. Would you mind, Mr. Deedy, trying it for us?"

Mr. Deedy, who was to take the part of the Banker in the play, stepped forward and sang in a mournful voice:

"Do you remember when first we met,
How, in that April weather,
Chasing a butterfly, we ran,
Over the hills together!"

"Good!" said Gregory Storm. "Now the last stanza."

"But shall we then withhold our hands
And stay our foolish feet
When next illusion flutters by?
I wonder, O my sweet!"

The effect was quite as droll as Felix had desired.

"Mr. Whipple," said Gregory Storm, "is the Advertising Man. Mr. Deedy is the Guide. And Miss Macklin, of course, is the Dryad. Are you ready?" He clapped his hands again.

Miss Macklin stepped back into the wings; the three men lay down, in attitudes of sleep, beside what was supposed to be a camp-fire in a forest, and Felix's play had begun.

Felix was looking at the girl in the wings. He had never taken the performance of his play very seriously; he had

never supposed that any group of people would ever be able to enter into its spirit. He had misjudged Gregory Storm. No fantasy was too quaint and absurd for him to understand, it seemed: and moreover, he had conveyed to these men on the stage his own zest in the fantasy—they really succeeded in transporting one into this realm of pseudo-reality in which anything might happen. . . . And that girl: she was, of all persons in the world, the one to play that part. She had an elvish look, the very air and gesture of one of those soulless, ever-living creatures of the wood, who have in one form or another haunted and tormented the imagination of masculine mankind. There was something about the shape of her mouth, a delicate sharpness of contour, which made it look inhuman, as though not made for mortal kisses; and the way her forehead went up and back on each side in strange receding planes to the roots of her tangled black hair—there was foreignness, and remoteness, and mystery, in that face. . . . He took his eyes from her.

These men were doing very well indeed. But what would an audience think? That was a different matter.

He waited for the Dryad's entrance. He wanted to hear her speak—she had not as yet uttered a single word. . . . Yes, her voice was all that it should be—low, deep, cool, clear, and as if from far away, beautiful and emotionless, the voice of an elf. . . . And really, it was amusing, this absurd discussion of morals that ensued, when the Dryad offered to accompany these men to Chicago—the discussion of what their wives would think, and her naïve questions, and their laboured explanations of marriage, and morality, and clothes, all the civilized things which a poor Dryad would find it so hard to understand and a Banker and an Advertising Man so difficult to explain. And then the Guide, the very Shavian Guide with a philosophy of his own—not a bad touch!

When Felix left the Artists' Theatre that night, he had a feeling that he had been away from the real world for a long time—like Rip Van Winkle coming back from a brief

stay in the Troll's Garden to find his friends all dead or grown old. . . . It was too deep an allurement. He must not go to any more rehearsals. They could get along well enough without him.

"How did the rehearsal go?" Rose-Ann waked up to ask.

"Beautifully," he said. "But the theatre is too much for me. I feel as though if I went behind the scenes again I would never come back."

"Would that be so terrible?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"But—I might go, too. . . . I'd like to play a part like your Dryad—if I could."

He remembered her suddenly as he had seen her among the children at the Community House Theatre. Yes, she could play such a part. But . . . he didn't want her to—for some reason which he could not understand. She must stay here in the world of reality—and keep him here.

"They said something about a ball—to make some money for the theatre," he remarked. "I suppose we'll have to go?"

"I'd like to go," she said, and commenced planning their costumes with enthusiasm.

XXLVII. The Fortunate Youth

I

ON the occasion of the opening bill of the Artists' Theatre, a young man who had just joined the staff of the Chronicle was delegated to attend and criticize the performance; what he said in praise or blame would not matter either way. . . . The play came off very well, was generously applauded, and there was an excited little supper afterward at which Felix and Rose-Ann and Clive and Phyllis and the cast of "The Dryad" drank a good deal of wine, and many compliments were bandied back and forth. And that, Felix thought, was the end of the matter.

But it seemed not. Of course, the young man who criticized the play for the Chronicle had to make a fool of himself and Felix by hailing him as "our new Barrie"; but that did not do any real harm. Most of the critics were sensible, and treated the event with casual indifference. But old Jennison, the "dean of the fraternity," had gone the second night, and given the play a most astonishing commendation, well-calculated to turn any young playwright's head—besides remarking privately to Felix on the street that he was wasting his time fooling with amateurs—why didn't he aim for Broadway, he had the stuff in him, and so forth. . . . And the bill was going so well, on account, it was said, of Felix's play, that the original run of two weeks had been extended to three.

Success? So his friends called it lightly, and though he made an effort to see it in its true perspective, Felix felt a glow of elation. Perhaps he had really shown that he could do something!

In this frame of mind, on the final night of the bill, which had managed to eke out a four weeks' run, he went

to another little supper party, with Rose-Ann, Clive and Phyllis, and the players, and heard—with somewhat less sense of being "guyed"—their extravagant praises. . . . Besides, he knew something that they did not know—not even, as yet, Rose-Ann: an actor-manager-playright from New York, who happened to be in town, had seen "The Dryad," liked it, and said that it could be made into a successful three-act play—had, in fact, offered to collaborate with him upon it! That sounded like the real thing. Perhaps these praises were not the absurdities they seemed. . . .

That evening Clive was in a difficult mood; he and Phyllis had been tormenting each other of late to the point of exacerbation. Clive's ironies lacked tonight the quality, whatever it was, that made them agreeable. He managed by some satirical remark to offend Miss Macklin, to whom he had been paying special attentions. He commenced to drink recklessly. Phyllis refused contemptuously to speak to him. And then suddenly he disappeared.

Phyllis came home with Felix and Rose-Ann. At the studio they made coffee, and talked about the ball and their costumes. At last Felix told them about the actor-manager and his offer.

"Well," Phyllis asked, "how does it feel to have everything you want?"

"It feels," Felix said, "unreal—disturbing. It can't be true. Do you remember the story of Polycrates?"

"No," said Phyllis.

"Herodotus tells about it—and I was thinking about it only today, and I made up a little rhyme about it. I'll tell you the story. . . ."

2

Phyllis, sitting on the floor, with her coffee beside her, was looking up at him with eager eyes, eyes full of pride greater even than Rose-Ann's. Rose-Ann was a realist. She knew all this did not amount to so much. This story was addressed to Phyllis. Rose-Ann, reclining on the settle,

seemed a little outside the circle of its intention, some one accidentally looking on.

"He was a Persian king—very rich, very powerful, very happy. And there came to visit him a Greek philosopher. The Persian king asked him, 'What is the use of philosophy?' And the Greek philosopher answered. 'It serves to reconcile us to the unhappiness of our lot.' 'Then what use is it to me?' the king asked. 'I am not unhappy. I am the happiest of mortals.' 'Yes,' said the philosopher, 'you are too happy. You had better beware!' 'Of what?' asked the king. 'Of the jealousy of the gods,' said the philosopher.

"That sounded reasonable enough to the king. He had nothing to fear from men; but the gods—they might well be jealous of him. 'What shall I do to appease their wrath?' he asked.

"Take the most precious thing you own, and throw it into the sea!" was the advice of the philosopher.

"Now the king had a certain ring, which at the beginning of his reign he had taken from the hand of a conquered monarch, and which he had always cherished as the symbol of his victorious career. It seemed to him the most precious of all his possessions, and so he went and threw it into the sea.

"But the next evening as the king and the philosopher sat down to dinner, the cook came running in with the ring, which he had that moment found in the entrails of a fish which was going to be the king's dinner. The king took it with great satisfaction, saying, 'The gods have given me back my ring.'

"But the philosopher turned pale, and said, 'The gods have rejected your gift,' and immediately went home, fearing to be in that kingdom when the wrath of the gods descended upon it.

"And when he had returned to Greece, he heard that the king's enemies had descended upon the kingdom and overthrown it, and sacked the palace, and carried away the king's wives, and built a great pyre of the palace furnishings and

set the king on top of it on his golden throne, to be burnt. . . .

"The story ends happily after all, in Herodotus. But it was a narrow squeak, and the gods only relented at the last minute, by softening the hearts of his conquerors and sending a rain to put out the fire. But the gods are capricious —and perhaps the next time they wouldn't change their minds."

"And the rhyme you made up about it?" Phyllis asked.

"Well, it points the moral of the tale:

"When there is nothing left to wish,
And Earth's too much like Heaven,
Throw away some lovely gift
Of all the gods have given!

"Too happy, like that king of old
Who gave the sea his ring—
Find out if there's in store for you
The fate of that old king!"

Rose-Ann sat up and smiled at him. "But Felix," she said, "you've got it all wrong! You don't understand the moral of that old fable at all!"

"No?"

"No!" said Rose-Ann. "The gods were angry at that old king because he didn't appreciate what they had done for him. . . . It was because he threw away some of the loveliness that they had given him, that they punished him. He was a coward—and the gods don't like cowards!"

"No?" . . . Felix was realizing now consciously what he had meant by the story. Those evenings in his work-room, with the door open between him and Phyllis, and Phyllis come in to sit on the floor beside him in some interval of his work—intervals that grew longer and longer—all the sweetness of that friendship, so much more than friendship that it was almost like love . . . it was this that he was going to throw away. He was going to give up his room, and get another, or return to the studio to work. It was this intention that he had unconsciously in mind when he wrote—

"Throw away some lovely gift
Of all the gods have given!"

"No, Felix," Rose-Ann was saying, "there's no use being afraid of good fortune. When the gods give us beauty, we must take it—not run away from it."

"So! . . ." he said. "I'm afraid the Greeks thought differently."

"They were so much less Greek, then," said Rose-Ann.

3

"It's late," said Phyllis. "I must go home. Will you take me, Felix?"

He put on his hat and went out with her silently.

They walked along the empty streets without a word until they reached the door of the house in which she lived. Then she lifted her face up to him, and said,

"You know that I love you, Felix."

XLVIII. Dream-Tryst

I

THE foundations of Felix's existence seemed to crack and fall apart, the whole edifice of thought and emotion in which he lived to topple and tumble in ruins.

"No," he said slowly, "—I didn't know."

They turned, and walked down the street toward the corner, side by side. At the corner they paused, and looked at each other helplessly.

"Yes, I do too know," Felix said. "I must have always known."

They stood looking at each other for a moment, and then turned back, walking along the street in silence, past the door of the house, to the corner, where they stopped again.

"I couldn't stand it," Phyllis said, "not to tell you. It hurt so—to have to keep it a secret, as if it were something to be ashamed of. And I thought—if there is anything in this modernism—this talk—if it really means anything, if it isn't all just a damned fake—I could tell you. I wanted to. I had to, Felix."

Yes. . . of course. That was the meaning of it all. . . .

"You aren't angry at me, Felix, for telling you?"

No—he wasn't angry. It seemed to him magnificent—the simplicity, the bravery, the candour of that confession. She was to him in that moment a person more quietly sure of herself, more nobly honest, than anything in all this tangled insincerity of modern life—a creature out of some poem of the world's youth. Beside him, as she walked, her very person seemed magnified—her soft brown hair, her dark quiet eyes, her serene mouth, seemed the features of an

epic heroine, who faced life strong-limbed, clear-eyed and unafraid. She was the embodiment of that calm, serene, strong girl-goddess who had been with him a recurring love-dream since childhood. The beauty, the simplicity, of that confession of love stirred him to the depths of his emotions. . . . And he realized that he had something to confess in return—something that this honesty of hers required of him. But they had turned again and walked back to the other corner before he could say it. It came with difficulty, with an effort that took all his courage, all his strength. And yet it must be said. . . .

"I love you, too, Phyllis."

She looked up at him, as if puzzled, startled, incredulous.

"I didn't know it till just this moment—but it's true."

"But—why?" She put her hand as if defensively to her bosom, to ward off a danger she had not apprehended.

"Why should you love *me?*"

He pondered. "I don't know. Why do people love each other? I don't know."

"You love me!" she repeated, as if it were a problem for which she were seeking the answer.

"Yes," Felix said soberly.

"But then—"

She did not finish her sentence, and they turned and walked again slowly back to the other corner.

"That makes a difference," she said. "I never thought of that. It was all so simple before."

"Are you sorry I—love you?" he asked.

"I don't know. I don't know what to think. I don't dare realize it. Of course I'm glad—and sorry, too—and frightened. Oh, Felix, what shall we do?"

She looked at him with grave, awed eyes.

"I—" Felix began, and stopped; and they resumed their walk, not touching each other. . . .

Felix had no sense of the street upon which he walked. He was detached from everything, except the knowledge of what had happened—that little cleared space of certainties,

about which was a whirling chaos in which all things fell confusedly into nothingness. . . .

He realized that he had to adjust this thing that had happened, to all the rest of his life, to Rose-Ann, to his marriage, to his career. The sense of those things, even of Rose-Ann, came slowly; his mind was reluctant to face them. He wanted to stay here, in this cleared space in which one thing was beautifully true. But already that moment was passing. With the sense of those other things, this that had happened was no longer beautiful, but terrible—a burden, a problem. . . .

He shook his head as if to free it from heaviness, the intolerable weight of thought. But he *must* think. . . . Was it true that he cared for nothing but this moment of mad beauty? Rose-Ann, his marriage, his home, his plans, his future—was it true that these things meant nothing to him? Could he forget them all in an instant? Had a word, a phrase, shattered the whole edifice of his life? Was all this elaborate structure of plans and ambitions, this sober adjustment to the world of solid reality, a bubble that vanished at a touch?

That was what he had been afraid of, that day in the hospital, when he had tried to tell Rose-Ann about himself. He had wanted to tell her what a fool he was. He had wanted to assure her that he would be such a fool no longer. And he had not had the courage. She had taken him as he was. She had exacted no promises. . . . Well, this was what he was like—this!

No—he must be sane. Just because this moment seemed the only thing in the world worth holding to, just because he wanted to stay in this dream-world, just because he cared about nothing else, he must fight his way back to reality. He must not surrender. This was the test: whether he could be a sane man, or must spend his whole life in the following of disconnected impulses, a vagabond and a fool. He wanted to keep this beauty: well, then, he must give it up.

They had stopped again, at the other corner. Phyllis regarded him quietly with troubled eyes. "Rose-Ann. . . ." she said.

"Yes. I know. Rose-Ann. And everything."

"No. We can't," she said.

"No. We mustn't."

They looked at each other bravely, and a little pitifully, and recommenced their silent promenade along the deserted street.

At the door, she stopped firmly, and held out her hand. "You must go," she said. "Good night. I'm—glad, in spite of everything. Good night."

He held her hand in his, desperately anxious to keep this moment's beauty a little longer, before he returned to the world of reality. "Will you—kiss me?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Not even in good-bye?" he urged.

She laughed, with a sudden resumption of lightness. "A good-bye kiss? There's no such thing, Felix! A kiss is always the beginning of things.—Good night!" She held his hand a moment, and added in the most friendly way, as if they were almost strangers, "I shall see you at the ball tomorrow night?"

2

He turned away, glad that she had been so sane—and sorry. Angry at her, for no reason. Happy that he was going home to Rose-Ann—to Rose-Ann, lovely and real now in his mind—out of all this madness!

He commenced to whistle tunelessly. . . .

And then, as if brought by the night-breeze, a breath of dream-nostalgia overwhelmed him, making him dizzy and faint. He stopped, trembling all over. . . .

By God, he must get over this. . . . He must get back to reality.

And Rose-Ann must help him. He would tell her everything. . . . He opened the door of the studio and cried out

her name, like a frightened child come back to its mother.

"Yes?" she called back. She was sitting up in bed, sewing spangles on her costume for the ball tomorrow night.

He suddenly realized that everything was all right—that there was nothing to tell.

XLIX. A Matter of Convention

1

NO—nothing to tell! . . . They talked about the ball, and the costumes they were to wear; and in the profound reassuring consciousness that life is something that need only be lived, that need not be discussed and understood, he fell asleep.

The next morning he was sorry he had not told Rose-Ann. But the moment to tell had passed. . . . Life was going on as usual, ignoring these private crises. Yes—he and Rose-Ann and Phyllis, just as if nothing had happened, were going to the Artists' Theatre Ball! Rose-Ann was going in a Spanish dress with a wonderful shawl for which she had long awaited the proper occasion, and Felix as a pirate, in green sash and orange shirt. . . . They were going to dance—instead of, as would have seemed most fitting to Felix, to discuss their destinies.

2

It was precisely this mere matter of dancing that now incongruously troubled him.

Felix was not a dancing man. And that would have been all right, if he had not wanted to dance. But he did want to dance! Even at this moment, with so much more important things to think about, it began to occupy all his thoughts. He wanted to dance. It was annoying not to be able to. . . . He had more than once gone through the excruciating agony of trying to learn. He had, in fact, learned, so far as one can learn anything against which there operates some mysterious inward paralysis. He knew the steps as well as he knew the multiplication table. But just as sometimes in school there had come upon him a fatal helpless confu-

sion in which he was unable to remember whether nine times seven was eighty-one or sixty-four, so it was when he tried to put his knowledge in practice in a ballroom. He reminded himself of nothing so much as the hapless hero of that old joke, who said, "Yes, I can dance, except that the music bothers me and the girl gets in my way!"

And he might have accepted his inability to dance as a fact, and let it go at that—except that it wasn't a fact! Somehow, heaven only knew how, half a dozen times in his adult life he *had* been able to dance—and not badly. But what were the circumstances which magically operated to liberate him from this mysterious paralysis, he did not know. He never knew whether he was going to be able to dance or not. He always went fearing the worst, and generally it happened. Rose-Ann could not understand it, because once when there had been impromptu dancing to a phonograph after a dinner party at some one's home, he had danced with her without the slightest awkwardness; but when, while dancing with her a second time, she whispered to him to ask some of the other girls to dance, he became embarrassed, and made protestations of his inability. She knew that he *could* dance, and she at first regarded his attitude as a kind of stupid stubbornness. But no scoldings, nor any patient gentleness for that matter, was able to change it.

Tonight Felix knew from the beginning that he was not going to be able to dance. He sat in the box with Rose-Ann and Phyllis and Clive and several of the players, utterly miserable. They had arrayed themselves for the ball at the Artists' Theatre, and that preliminary part of the affair had been, as it always was, delightful. He wished one could dress up to go to a ball, and then not go. The dressing, the showing off of costumes, the banter, the laughter, the drinking of cocktails and black coffee, all the preparations, had been good fun; but now commenced the evening's misery. Rose-Ann looked at him inquiringly as the orchestra struck up a two-step, and he shook his head. No—he couldn't do it tonight. And so she stepped off in

the arms of Clive. Phyllis—he had never danced with Phyllis—was waiting, he thought, for him to ask her. He doggedly leaned over the edge of the box and watched the dancers. Why, he asked himself, had he come? He saw Phyllis a minute later, dancing with a man in a pseudo-monkish costume, one of the actors. Elva Macklin—had she taken that name Elva because she knew she was elvish, or had the prevision of parents bestowed it upon her?—was dancing with Gregory Storm. The box was vacated, except for Felix, who sat looking on the scene with a jealous and angry eye.

A few pieces of coloured cloth, a bangle, some rouge, a military coat, a shawl, a sash, a bit of lace, a strain of music, and these people were transformed, one and all, out of their accustomed workaday mood, gone happily into an atmosphere of fantasy such as with infinite labour was created in the theatre. They were acting, all of them—not paying any attention to what part any one else was acting, but content to be in an environment in which their own play-impulses were released. They went as in a dream—smiling, moved by the music as the leaves of a tree are moved by the wind, surrendering themselves utterly to its influence. They were not here, not here in this plush and gilt room, amid commonplace mortals decorated with coloured cloth, but in some dreamland, some fairyland of their own wishes. The person whom one held in one's arms was not a real person, in whom one was really interested, not a person to love or hate, but a part of the dream. A wand had been waved over this assemblage, commanding them to forget, to dream, to be free and happy and young. And all of them, except himself only, had obeyed. Why could he not surrender himself to this influence? Why must he remain, in spite of his sash and coloured shirt, so obstinately and awkwardly and unhappily himself? Why did not that music touch some secret spring in his soul, too, to make him its creature, a leaf wind-blown on the tree of life? Why did his eyes still see the persons underneath

their costumes—the girls not as dancing partners but as "personalities"? Personalities, indeed!—these men and women had left their personalities gladly behind in the cloakroom; they were free of them for the evening; tomorrow they would go back to being lawyers and wives, clerks and poets and college students; tonight they were—

Well, what were they? If one chose to think so, bodies, merely that, bodies surrendering themselves to each other as shamelessly and frankly as to the music which swayed them. . . . But no, he knew better than that: they were—if ever, now, precisely now—immortal souls; this spectacle was spirit triumphing over flesh and using it for its own beautiful uses, the magic uses of a dream. These arms and bosoms and bodies were the instruments of a poetry which these couples created in a magnificently impersonal way—the poetry of beauty met with strength; it was not Dick and Jane, it was essential man and woman, in love with some eternal beauty in themselves and each other of which they were, as persons, the fleeting and mortal agents.

But why the devil couldn't *he* feel that way? Each time that the girls of his party returned to the box, flushed and laughing in an interim between the dances, he felt their presence as a demand upon him, a demand which it was disgraceful not to meet. Every glance of Rose-Ann's was a look, or so he interpreted it, of inquiry or reproach. She *knew* he could dance; that was the worst of it. He could dance—with her—easily enough; he would dance with her now, if there was no one else around that they knew. But if he danced with her, he would have no excuse for not dancing with the others—his last defence would be gone. . . . He fled from the box in the direction of the bar, was pulled down into a chair by Eddie Silver, who was buying drinks for a group of men and girls, and asked what he would have. "Whiskey straight," he said humbly. why, after all, should he despise this time-hononred refuge from the hardships of life, from problems too complex to be solved and responsibilities too great to be borne?

3

He could not, it seemed, get drunk. The whiskey only made him think with a preternatural clearness; and the more clearly he thought upon himself, as a straggler here in the bar-room from the battle-field of life out there on the dancing floor, the more he despised himself. . . . But he seemed to be despising some one else named Felix Fay, from whom he felt utterly detached and for whom he felt no responsibility. Funny Felix! In a way he could understand the poor devil. . . . He had been brought up in a puritanical way, and then had acquired a lot of romantic notions from poetry-books; and in spite of all his fine intellectual theories he was still just a romantic boy-prude, to whom the idea of taking a strange girl in his arms and walking her around the room to music would naturally be upsetting. . . . A funny boy, that Felix Fay! Why, he had been thinking quite seriously of making love to another girl besides his wife—and he would be quite equal to it, too . . . after arguing it out theoretically and finding that it was his sociological duty or something of that sort! . . . He wanted things to be plain and straightforward, black and white; either he was making love to a girl or he wasn't—it was the in-between things that confused and appalled him. To this Felix Fay person it would be simple enough to defy the conventions; what he couldn't do was adjust himself to them like everybody else. He could intellectually conceive, and if it came to that, undertake to carry into practice, some preposterous theory of free-love that he had read about in Havelock Ellis or Ellen Key; but he couldn't dance with a girl he liked! No, that was too difficult; it wasn't a theory, and he hadn't read about it in a book. . . . If people *didn't* dance, and some one wrote a book and proved that they ought to, Felix Fay would believe it, and argue about it, and finally do it in a mood of stern conscientious futuristic morality—if they killed him for it! But do something that everybody else did—no. Not Felix. Somebody else would have kissed Phyllis long ago, and said nothing about it. If

somebody else had thought of having a love-affair with Phyllis, the last person in the world he would have thought of discussing it with would have been his own wife. The world forgave people who kissed in corners, who had secret love-affairs while pretending to believe—while actually believing—in the ten commandments and the laws of the state of Illinois. If you accepted what everybody believed, you could have the same freedom as everybody else. It was only if you believed in freedom, really believed in it, that you couldn't have any. Why couldn't Felix Fay understand that? . . . Poor devil, he was going to get in trouble some time. . . .

The being who thus in a state of utter detachment scornfully and sadly criticized Felix Fay, floated back airily, or at least with no sense of treading any actual floor with mortal feet, to the ballroom. Across the room he saw some one coming toward him, smiling. It was Elva Macklin; but it was not by that name, nor as the actress who had taken a part in his play, that he identified her; it was rather as a childhood playmate—a girl with whom he had once danced, long years ago, in a garret. She was dressed as a dryad, disguised in a leafy covering, but he recognized her well enough. It was clear to him that they had an engagement to dance together—an engagement that had waited all these years. The music struck up, he held out his arms, and she walked into them without a word. They floated off across the room, into the maze of dancers, threading their way among the others with that ease which comes of senses quickened with music, pausing and turning, drawing upon the floor an intricate pattern of movement born of fancy. The others in the room did not exist for him, save as shadows, bright shadows cast by the music. They were alone, in a dream, in a soft wordless dream; they did not so much listen to the music as create it by their own movements. They had left the world of reality, as if for ever, they were in some realm of golden light, a land of fruits and flowers, a place of quiet, triumphant happiness. This girl with him was no real girl, but a part of the dream; he

had always known her; she was the companion of many wanderings through the lands of reverie; they understood each other too well to need words; she was his dream comrade. Not a girl, not anyone that one must love or not love, fight for and work for, but a shadow like himself in this place of bright shadows, in this peaceful and happy realm beyond life and beyond death. . . .

The music stopped, and he awoke with some astonishment to find that he, Felix Fay, had been dancing. Elva Macklin smiled, gave his hand a grateful pressure, and turned to the young man who came up asserting that the next dance was his.

Suddenly alarmed, Felix turned to flee from the ballroom; but it was too late. Phyllis had detached herself from her partner, and came over to him. "Aren't you going to dance with me?" she asked. The handclapping died away as the musicians took up their instruments again. Phyllis faced him confidently—a lovely and to him at this moment a terrifying figure. All the sweetness of the love that might have been—that might be—his, kindled for him in her grave eyes. Dance with her? No, he couldn't. But he must. Self-consciously, ashamed of himself, hating her, he took her hand, put his arm about her, and listening intently to the music, stepped off. But something was wrong; he could not get the rhythm; he stopped. She had surrendered herself to his guidance utterly, but now that that was at fault she began to try to guide him. That made him angry; he paused once more, listened to the music, and said. "Oh, confound it—it's a waltz. I'm sorry—I can't waltz." She regretfully walked back with him to the edge of the dancing floor, where he tried desperately to think of something to say to her. It was shameful to be thus at a loss. Did she despise him? She ought to. . . . Some one else came along, and she danced off, leaving Felix furious and relieved. He went back to the box.

Rose-Ann was there, resting from innumerable dances, talking with Clive. "I see you've been dancing!" she said. "Yes," he told her, "I don't know how it happened. Will

you try the next one with me?" At least, if he made a failure of it with Rose-Ann, she would forgive him.

"Yes," she said. "Just this one more dance, and then we'll go home."

Because it was the last dance, because he need fear nothing more tonight, and because he had secretly resolved never to subject himself to this torment again, the demon in his mind that argued and discussed and made him awkward and afraid, went to sleep. His last dance, his last dance ever—and then . . . back to a desk, where he belonged!

"Why!" said Rose-Ann, "you dance beautifully!" She said it in a puzzled tone.

Felix was annoyed. He lost the rhythm and stepped on her foot.

"It's my fault!" she said. But he knew it wasn't. Why did he try to dance when he couldn't? Wouldn't that music ever stop?

He wanted to tell Rose-Ann about—about Phyllis. She would understand.

L. Babes in the Wood

I

HE told her that night; they talked till dawn. She did understand; and so, it seemel to him, did he—for the first time. Everything became simple and clear again—a final proof, if the doubting mind required such proof, that candour was a medicine for all the ills of love.

Things like this—emotional upsets—occurred in all marriages; the trouble was that the disturbed emotions were left to fester in secret. Talking with Rose-Ann had put the incident in its true light. Yes—of course he and Phyllis loved each other; that was not strange. There was an element of love in every friendship between man and woman; and that it should be here in this friendship of his and Phyllis's was right and natural. It was not a thing to be afraid of, to run away from—it was something rather to be glad about. It had been there between them all this while, enriching their two lives, his and Phyllis's, making their friendship one full of tenderness and understanding; it had done them no harm, certainly! Civilization meant the possibility of such friendships, instead of a timid restricting of the emotions to a single person. The world was full of men and women friends who were in this sense lovers; only they did not usually confess it to each other. Sometimes they were afraid to let each other know the truth; sometimes afraid to face the truth themselves. But was there anything terrible in such a truth? Phyllis and he had faced it, that was all. They had spoken out what was usually left unspoken. And why should that change their lives?

It was the fault of Romance, that suave peddler of spiritual poisons; and of Puritanism, that maniacal purveyor of chains and padlocks—it was the fault of these two that

the situation should ever for a moment have seemed alarming. Over the scene, as he and Phyllis had stood together telling each other a secret that any one else in the world could have read at a glance, there had brooded these two antique and ridiculous fantasms—Romance and Puritanism. Romance had whispered to them: "This is a moment such as comes only once in a lifetime—a moment beautiful and tragic! You were born for this! You cannot escape! You are Paris and Helen, Antony and Cleopatra, Lancelot and Guenevere, Tristram and Iseult! You are the hero and heroine of all myths, all dreams! Your love is doomed and beautiful! Some death will run its sudden finger round this spark and sever you from the rest. . . . Kiss now, and die!" And on the other side that gibbering lunatic Puritanism had cried out: "No! no! Put on these chains. Blindfold your eyes so that you cannot see beauty, stop up your ears against all sweet voices! Tie your hands together lest they touch what is not yours, and put a chain upon your feet lest they stray from the accustomed path. Padlock your lips, lest they say what is in your heart, and seal up your heart so that no tenderness, no generous faith, no natural affection may escape! Be blind and deaf and dumb, become as one dead, for only in this is safety!" And between these two fantastic ghosts they had stood and trembled, finding it hard to discover of themselves the obvious and simple thing to do, but reading it at last in each other's eyes—to go on being in love with each other and behave exactly as before!

So it seemed to Felix as he lay and talked with Rose-Ann till dawn. . . . He felt that he was something of a simpleton, but that life itself was easy enough to live if one could only learn to deal with it directly and see it as it was.

2

It was strange that after that beautiful discovery Felix should have waked to a sense of dull unhappiness, of loss, of grief. . . . He tried to conceal these feelings from Rose-Ann. It was as if he had not been sincere in giving up the

possibility of happiness with Phyllis—that possibility which had seemed to exist so long as he left his secret untold, but which he had killed with his confession. Was it so simple a matter, after all? He sometimes suspected that he would be content with nothing less than the impossible. . . .

The first afternoon that he had not had to work at the office, an afternoon when ordinarily he would have gone to his workroom, and met Phyllis there when she came home from her work, and stopped writing to talk with her—that afternoon he stayed in his studio. And he asked himself—was it because he did not believe that things were as he and Rose-Ann had told each other? Was it because he would feel conscious of a chain of duty, and preferred to wear it, if at all, here at home? Yes, what was the use of being hypocritical about the situation? Why pretend that love was so docile, so manageable and good-natured, so tame a beast? It was a creature of the jungle—or was it, really? Perhaps the reason he did not trust himself with Phyllis was that he feared to discover that they were merely good friends after all!

He stayed at home and was restless and discontented. If he could really believe—his incorrigible utopianism demanded that—in his freedom, he could be content. He loved Rose-Ann. But why this sham, this lie—that he could love Phyllis, too, and no harm done? Of course he wanted Phyllis—and was willing to give her up, if it were understood that that was what he was doing. But it was intolerable, this pretence that he could do as he pleased. Could he? Yes, suppose it had pleased him to say—

Rose-Ann interrupted his thoughts, the fifth evening. She was sitting at her desk, and Felix at his. Suddenly she rose.

"Felix," she said. Her voice had a ring of painful resolution in it. He turned, with a feeling of fear. She stood leaning back against her desk, resting her hands on it.

"Felix! I have made up my mind. . . . Don't talk, I want to say what I have to say. . . . I'm not mistaken this time. I've seen you. You're unhappy. . . . I know you

don't believe I meant what I said—that you could have your freedom. But it's true. . . . You love Phyllis. Don't you?"

It was a challenge. This thing had to be settled now. Did he love Phyllis? The devil only knew. But for the purposes of this damned argument—

"Yes!" he said defiantly. "I do!"

His mind went back to the time when they had innocently rehearsed this scene in farce. . . . Now it was happening in deadly earnest. Yes—in deadly earnest.

"The thing I can't stand," he said, between clenched teeth, "is hearing you say such things and not believing you mean them. . . ."

"You can believe me, Felix. . . . I want you to be happy, more than anything else in the world. I don't care. . . . You've been wanting her all week. Go to her. . . . And—don't worry about me, Felix. Everything will come out all right."

They stared solemnly at each other, trying to realize what was happening—bracing themselves to meet a moment which they had lightly envisaged in theory, in discussion, but which in reality had an air of terribleness about it. That conversation should have taken place against a background of thunders and lightnings. It was as if with these words they had pushed aside the dear, familiar walls of everyday reality, and were face to face with naked, elemental forces—as if they were suddenly alone and helpless in the midst of a huge, impersonal, indifferent and awful universe.

3

"Go to her," Rose-Ann repeated softly; and with the feeling of one strangely doomed, one who rested under the burden of a frightful duty not to be flinched from, Felix went quietly out of the studio.

He could still see Rose-Ann's eyes in his imagination: those eyes, not tearful now, but grave and brooding, full of courage. . . . Yes, at last he believed her.

LI. "Bienfaits de la Lune"

I

ON the sidewalk, the branches and leaves of a tree made an enchanting pattern of shadow—cast it seemed by the moonlight, though it was only by the electric arc on the corner. But, as Felix looked up, he saw, past that false light, the moon itself, above the low roofs. It seemed to spring free from an encumbering wrack of grey clouds, and stay poised, alone and splendid, in the blue depths of sky. Felix's gaze went to that far white beacon with a sense of return to his own world—and with a sense of profound release in that return. . . . For there was a world besides the world of daylit reality; a world not of work and wages, of code and custom, of law and habit; another world besides that in which men and women customarily dwelt—yes, there was this world lit by the changing and ranging moon! Though people turned their backs upon it, and hid within their houses, and sought to escape its disturbing influences, it was there. It always had been there, it always would be there. It was as real as the workaday world. And it was his world. He had tried to renounce it, to shut it out, to flee from its magic. He had tried to believe that there was nothing in life except that routine of daily reality in which he was immersed. A world of debts, and promises to pay; a world of roofs, owned and dwelt under and ever returned to. There was something close and cloying about that world; something of the fetid odour of toil hung about its very pleasures. It was slavery; its laughter and kisses were the gilt upon the chains. Believing in that slavery, men had built the four walls of the world, stone upon stone. And yet, outside, was freedom. . . .

Felix became aware of himself, standing bareheaded a few steps from the door of his studio, gazing at the moon. He was aware of the absurdity of that moment of moon-struck vision. He remembered the errand he was upon, and how weighted with tragedy it had seemed a minute since. He realized the symbolic character of his departure from the studio. Yes—symbolic! For he knew now that he did not care two pins for Phyllis—as a person. What Rose-Ann had said of him was utterly true. He did not care for persons—not even for Rose-Ann. He lived in a world of ideas. And because he had found the idea of Rose-Ann as his jailor intolerable, he had taken her at her word, accepted his liberation, gone out of the door. But not—he smiled at the foolish thought—not into another captivity, not into the warm, constraining, anxious arms of Phyllis, or any other! No—he was free now of the idea of that tyranny; and Rose-Ann was free of it. With her gesture motioning him to go, she had broken the intolerable chain that had irked their lives. Free now, his own master, drawing his breath without permission from any other living being, once more able to call his soul his own, he could enjoy at last the companionship, in a common love of beauty, of the one being on earth who loved beauty as he loved it—and who understood freedom and the need of freedom better, indeed, than he had ever understood it! She had never lied to herself or to him. From the first she had disdained to accept the promises which he had been so eager to make. She was a true child of the moon, blessed with its gifts, no staid denizen of the sober realm of day, but fleet of soul and changeable and free like her immortal mother and mistress!

No—he realized it now—no mere woman could hold his love; it had been folly to hope and pretend so; not Rose-Ann, not Phyllis, not any woman. But one who could be more and less than woman, who did not, as mortal women do, want to own and be owned; who possessed herself with a divine aloofness, who had her own orbit that nothing could

deflect—in her he could find a companionship deeper than any mortal love.

Even to himself, as he conned over these thoughts, standing bareheaded on the sidewalk, with a mind confused as by the splendour of a revelation, they seemed wanting in final definite clearness. He was happy in a profound discovery, which he sought to put into words to carry back to Rose-Ann. Not that she did not know already; for had she not forced this discovery upon him? She had known all along! And when he returned, there would be no words needed. But still he must seek for the words. . . . But any way he tried to put it to himself sounded so damned mystical, like some cryptic sentence of William Blake's. And it was all so obvious! *They were free.* Yet that meant nothing. Foolish people like Clive Bangs were always talking about "freedom." They were free, one might put it that way, free *not* to love each other! A blessed freedom. . . . One might love any woman. But here was something greater than love. To know that there was something in themselves still uncaptured, ever unattainable—something which could not be yielded, by whose inviolable having they moved secure and serene among a world of emotional bond-slaves, like the moon among the shattered vainly-grasping clouds! More beautiful in her than any bodily beauty was that ultimate self-possession, that unshaken and unshakeable identity, of which that gesture of hers, pointing him to the door, had been the symbol. Not because they needed each other, not because they were so poor in spirit that each must lean upon the other—no, not in poverty of soul, but in a sublime indifference, their love had its origin. Because they did not need each other, because they could do without each other, this was added unto them, this happiness of being together. Felix saw himself and Rose-Ann like mountain-climbers, high on some chill peak above a coward, sleepy world that dozed and battened beneath its coverlets. Or like two eagles, circling in the austere upper air. Theirs should be no common happiness. . . .

He turned to re-enter the studio.

2

The door was locked, and he had to use his key. He did so only half-consciously, and blinked at the blaze of light inside. It was a few seconds before he saw.

On the settle, and strewn over chairs, and on the floor, lay half of Rose-Ann's wardrobe; and Rose-Ann herself, with her face hidden in her arms, was seated ridiculously in an open suitcase on the floor, from which the ends of stockings strayed out—seated there, with her arms on her knees, rocking back and forth, and crying, with a low, choked sobbing—rocking back and forth, back and forth, in the suitcase, like a child in a cradle, crying. . . .

She had been packing up. To go. And she was crying. He stared at her, and the vision he had had outside of their splendid happiness was obliterated by the wash of a vast wave of bitterness.

She looked up, her face distorted, made ugly with a choked sob, stained with tears. She tried to speak. He stared at her. He was beginning to pity her. . . . But he must not pity her. If he did, he would despise her. He did not dare see her, so soon after this mad nonsense under the moon, as little, weak, lonely, afraid. He tried not to see her at all—and she seemed to recede from him, to grow dim and faint and remote.

"Go away!" she cried, and turned her face from him, still stooped in that ridiculous, infantile, pitiful posture.

He did not pity her now. He stood dazed as from a blow, dazed with the terrific shock of the impact of reality upon his dream. He tried to rouse himself, to see, to feel. But everything was misty and unreal to him. He spoke to her, as though across a vast space, dully.

"So you didn't mean it?"

She sprang up.

"Why are you here? Didn't you go? Aren't you going? Are you trying to torture me?"

She advanced upon him with eyes that blazed, hair wild, and hands that had transformed themselves into claws ready

to scratch and tear him. He saw all this as if it were a picture—a picture irrelevant to the text. He made a little gesture as if to turn the leaf.

"So you didn't mean it," he said again.

She stopped, close to him; looked at him searchingly. "Where have you been?" she asked uncertainly.

He laughed mirthlessly. "Outside the door—looking at the moon."

"I thought—" she said.

"No," he said, quietly, sadly. All this ought to matter greatly. But somehow it didn't matter at all.

"But—" she said.

They looked at each other.

"So you didn't mean it," he said once more, like a refrain.

Her demeanour changed suddenly. She looked at the clothes on the chairs and on the floor, and went over and stood beside the open suitcase.

"I don't know what I meant," she said wearily. "I couldn't stand it. I was going home." She gave the suitcase a little kick, and came back to Felix. "But I don't understand you!" she said. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," he said indifferently.

"Felix!" she said desperately. "What has happened? Where are we? Do we love each other? I don't understand anything any more. Tell me! Help me!"

"I don't know," he said slowly.

"Oh!" she said savagely. "You don't know! Why do you stand there and look at me like that? Are you dead, or am I?"

"I don't know."

She took hold of his shoulders fiercely, to shake him, and then dropped her hands. "Are you angry at me?" she asked. "Why?"

"No," he said. "I'm not angry. I just—don't seem to care."

"I know I'm a fool!" she said. "And—Felix, I did mean it. I thought I did. But—it was too terrible. . . . After all, I'm human, Felix."

"Yes—I see you are."

"And you're not. No—you're not human. You're a monster. . . . I—hate you! Not because of Phyllis—no; you don't love her, either. You don't love anybody. You stand there—can't you understand, can't you say something, can't you pity me a little? Felix!"

He saw, he heard, across an infinite gulf. He would have liked to stir, to speak. But he was encased in an icy armour. Nothing of this touched him.

She sat down on a chair, spilling its burden of clothing to the floor. "How long," she asked between clenched teeth, "is this going to go on?"

He did not answer.

"Because," she said, "I can't bear it. It's—it's worse than the other. I could have borne that, I think—now. I was really sorry for you, Felix. But you aren't sorry for me. I know—I pretended to be a superwoman; and I'm not. But can't you forgive me? Can't you allow me my—my feelings? . . . No—you haven't got any feelings. . . . Well—I can't stand this. I can't stand it. I—"

His mind came back reluctantly to the scene. He sat down.

"I'm very tired," he said. "Can't we stop talking about it?"

She brushed her hand bewilderedly across her forehead. "Why is it?" she said. "I'm being made to feel like a criminal? Have I done anything?"

He spoke with an effort. "No," he said. "Everything is all right—I think. I'm sorry I'm behaving this way. Forgive me if you can. I can't help it."

"Forgive you? For what?"

"For—for thinking you meant it. I should have known."

She sprang up. "I can't stay here," she said. "I must go somewhere to think things out. I can't stay here and have you say that to me, over and over. . . . Felix, I'm going away somewhere for a while. I'll come back, I suppose. But—you see I must go, don't you?"

"No. But it's all right."

He watched her pack her suitcase, still in the strange half-trance which made him unable to stir. It was as if he were drunk or hypnotized. He could see that she was going; he knew that he ought to stop her. But it did not seem to matter. . . . Only when she was dressed for the journey, and standing before him to say good-bye, did the numbness begin to vanish. He was ashamed of himself—ashamed and frightened. He felt that he had been under the influence of a kind of insanity—for surely that was the very essence of insanity, to be utterly indifferent to all the events of the outside world! She did not know, even though she had seen, how remote from her he had been—how dead to her, how dead to all reality. . . .

In the sudden uprush of consciousness, as the spell broke, he took her in his arms, and kissed her and clung to her. "Don't go!" he cried. "Don't go!" He vaguely remembered having told himself that they were different from other people—different, in that they could do without each other. What folly! He had thought himself strong, self-sufficient. He was the weakest, loneliest, most helpless person in the world. "Don't go, Rose-Ann!"

But she was hard now, though his pleading moved her. She kissed him wildly. "I will come back," she said. "I think I shall. But I must be by myself. I must." And she tore herself from his arms, and left the studio.

He flung himself on the floor and cried, like a broken-hearted child.

LII. Sleepless Nights

I

IT was preposterous that one should go to an office the next day after a night like that—to an office, and write a foolish editorial, and smile, and talk to people, as if nothing had happened. But it was better that way; one actually forgot for minutes at a time what had happened, till it came back with a bewildering influx of memory. There was also a play which one could go to, even though it seemed strange to be by oneself, sitting beside an empty seat. One could pay attention to the play, could even think of things to say about it, could write those things coherently on paper, could go out and mail them in the box on the corner, just as usual.

There was only one flaw in the usualness of all this. It was not usual for Felix Fay to write so solemnly about a new play. It was his habit to treat serious plays lightly, and light plays seriously; but it was a departure from his manner to be actually grave about anything. This play happened to be about a man who, after a life-time of self-deluded egotism, had suddenly found out by accident what sort of person he actually was. Here was material for Felix's customary light irony; why should he write upon the theme so solemnly—"that day when one walks upon a reeling earth under an insane sky"—as if it were Judgment Day he was talking about, and he himself had been there!

He had explained—or not explained—Rose-Ann's absence in a phrase. "She's gone off somewhere—I don't know just where."

It was the calm, indifferent tone of this remark that carried the impression of everything being quite all right. It carried, indeed, the conviction, redoubled and renewed,

of this being a remarkable, a wonderful, an exemplary marriage. These people really lived up to their modernist theories! Rose-Ann had wanted to go off somewhere, and she had not bothered to tell Felix where she was going, nor he to inquire! That, truly, was freedom!

2

To Phyllis, indeed, the notion occurred—only to be devoutly disbelieved, repudiated and forgotten—that Rose-Ann's absence was a consequence of her own talk with Felix the other night. But Felix's imperturbable demeanour, when she met him and Clive at lunch, his air of being somewhat preoccupied with a literary problem, the complete absence of any anxiety in his face, reassured her. She had been happy in telling Felix the truth—or what seemed to emerge from her tangled emotions as the truth. She had wished to believe that this was possible; and she had dared herself to prove it possible. She had told him, in defiance of all convention, that she loved him! There was a splendour in it for which her doubting mind ached, as a parched throat for an appeasing drink. That he should tell her that he loved her in return was bewildering and troubling; and if it was news that she secretly desired to hear, had secretly hoped to elicit, she would not let herself realize it. For a moment *her* universe had been shaken; but for a moment only. Things had righted themselves, after an intoxicating earthquake-tremour, in which all sorts of possibilities, vast and terrible and sweet, had presented themselves. For a moment she had felt for Felix a new emotion, one of pity mixed with tenderness; almost, her ideal of him had crumbled, when he said that he loved her in return. For it was as Rose-Ann's husband that she loved him—as the partner of an ideal marriage. For a dismayed second she had thought he was going to tell her that he no longer loved Rose-Ann; but it wasn't so. Things were as they should be. . . . Except that he shouldn't have wanted to kiss her. She disdained him for that weakness. She had been meaning to ask for that kiss herself! As a gift, a concession

from his strength to her weakness—yes; but not as something he wanted. . . .

But, as she remembered the event, she forgave him even that, for it seemed to her that he had been sorry for her. That was why he had wanted to kiss her; and if she had realized that, she would have let him. . . . As she re-enacted the scene in memory, it seemed to her that he had been magnificently untouched by it all. She saw herself, discontented, unhappy, making her confession of love; and he, listening quietly, as one who had the right to be loved. . . . So it should be—so she had thought of him. And he had said that he loved her too: he had not been afraid that she would misunderstand him. She flushed at the thought that she almost had misunderstood. . . . But, no—everything had gone beautifully.

And Rose-Ann—he had of course told Rose-Ann—what did she think of it? Rose-Ann would not begrudge her this confession, this moment of beauty. Rose-Ann had gone away. Why? Perhaps her plans had jibed with the generous desire to let these two, Felix and Phyllis, be more together. Perhaps it was her way of showing that it was all right. . . .

Underneath all these rationalizations there was, deep in Phyllis's mind, a panic fear which she would not recognize—a fear which was also a desire. If she could have thought of Felix as her lover without despising him, she would have yielded to that thought. But it was only as some one already too happy to need her love, that she could love him. If she could have thought that she was capable of harming his happiness, he would have ceased to be admirable in her eyes. If it were possible to have him for a lover, he would be like anybody else. . . . No, she must believe in the miraculous perfection of Felix's marriage in order to go on being in love with him. . . .

3

It seemed incredible to Felix that one mad moment could have done all this. For one moment only he had surrendered

to an insane illusion; and the results had been profound and incalculable. All this time, for two years, ever since the day in Port Royal when he had burnt his crazy novel, he had been struggling unceasingly with his own folly. No one had understood that struggle, no one had helped him. Rose-Ann had not understood. She had sought in every way to encourage him in what was, in the end, sheer madness. Only by keeping his feet upon the earth, only by continually distrusting himself, by trying to find what was most difficult to do, and doing that—subjecting himself to the discipline of reality—only so could he save himself. Step by step he had deserted that firm ground, and gone into the world of dreams—where, he knew now, he could not live except alone. He did not want to be alone. He wanted the world of dear, familiar realities—he wanted Rose-Ann. He wanted Rose-Ann.

4

And, meanwhile, where was she? At her father's home, probably. Should he write to her there? No—a stubborn pride surged up in him, forbidding him to write. She must come back.

Was it true, then, that he did not love her? Surely, if he loved her, he would ask her to return!

But he could not.

She must be there, at home. There was nothing to worry about. . . . And yet, by day and night, disturbing fantasies arose in his mind, of all the accidents that might have happened to her—gruesome fantasies, that unwound themselves in his mind. He would awake from one of these imaginings with a sense of guilt, as though he had actually been gloating over the picture. He tried to think her safe. But his imagination would present—yes, her very death before his eyes. It was horrible, like a recurring nightmare.

A week passed, and she did not return. He worried about her, night and day; and yet he could not force himself to write the few lines that might bring her back to his side. Perhaps she only wanted to be reassured. Perhaps she was

waiting for that summons. . . . Well, she must come back without it.

As a practical matter, it became more and more difficult to carry on the pose that everything was all right. His secret burden became almost intolerable. He wanted to tell some one. But who could understand? Not Clive, not Phyllis. . . .

He stayed in the studio every moment when he was not in the office, for fear she would return and not find him there. He must be there when she came back.

It never occurred to him that she might not come back.

The issue in his own mind was clear—he had gone over it a thousand times; at night he rehearsed it to himself sleeplessly, hour after hour. *He had made a fool of himself. But it had been her fault.*

Yes, her fault. That was why he could not write. He would have to write humbly, if he wrote at all; and he was in no humble mood. His loneliness, his need of her, only exasperated his sense of the injury she had done him. . . . She had urged him on to folly—that was hard enough to forgive—and then she had turned and fled from a situation which she herself had created. . . . All this could be discussed and understood between them; but first she must come back. That surrender was essential.

It was hard to stick it out this way, in lonely, sleepless waiting. But she knew—it was her own fault; her return would be an admission of that. *Then* he could say how ashamed he was of himself. But first. . . .

He must wait—till she came back.

Who had talked of "freedom"? Who had refused to face the facts of marriage? Who had engineered, planned, touched the match to this explosion? She knew well enough! He need not say these things to her, ever. She would confess them by her return. That would be enough.

She was stubborn—but he was still more stubborn. He could wait.

She would come back—and then. . . .

They would start all over again—sensibly.

5

Rose-Ann, meanwhile, as her husband supposed, was at her father's home in Springfield. If her presence there excited any curiosity, she was scarcely aware of it. She was not concerned with anything but the problem of herself and Felix. . . .

She was not, however, as he sometimes imagined, waiting for a letter from him to make easy her return home. She was, as she had told him, trying to "think things out."

She had gone away with that sentence of his ringing in her mind: *"So you didn't mean it after all!"*

She had not slept that night, on the train; nor very much since that time. She was too busy trying to think things out; and the chief thing to think out was: *had* she meant it when she offered Felix his freedom?

No, obviously enough! And yet her pride revolted from that fact. Had she been a liar, a hypocrite, all this while? Had she only pretended? It was too shameful. . . .

She really had meant it. She had been in earnest. She had understood what she was saying. She had thought she could do it. . . .

Was she too weak, then? Oh, no! It was a mere momentary weakness, a spiritual infirmity that she had not expected, but that she could have conquered. If only Felix had not come in just then! What a fool she must have seemed! What a liar!

But why couldn't he have understood? She was a woman, after all.

No! he had been quite right to disdain her. After all she had said to him, to sit there on the floor, blubbering. . . . She blushed with infinite shame.

That was the trouble. . . . She had not had time to adjust herself to the situation. It had been a moment of madness when she suddenly commenced packing to go home. She had not known what she was doing. . . . An hour later, she would have been calm again, herself, assured, smiling. He need never have known. . . .

But—if she really meant it—then she must prove it.

Well?

In among these reasoned arguments that pursued each other in an endless weary circle in her mind, floated irrelevant memories—the pressure of Felix's arm about her shoulders that afternoon on the train going out to Woods Point to be married—a fragment of that wild letter he had written her from Canal Street, about the girl in Iowa—the look in his eyes as he had seen her among the children at the Community Theatre. . . . and still more irrelevant memories—the complaining tones of her mother, saying cruel and unjust things about her father, things not meant for a child's ears, years ago—and her father's face, with its wise, mocking, incredulous, ironic smile, cutting her to the heart. . . .

Well?

If she went back, if she proved that she meant what she had said—things would have to be different. They had been too close. They had been like other married people. That was his fault. Yes, it was his fault, after all, that she had not been able to carry out her promises. He had made it too hard for her. . . . They never should have lived together under the same roof. They never should have become legally married in the first place. . . .

They would have to live apart, in separate studios. They must not pretend to be man and wife. She would be—yes, that was the word which made their relationship clear—his mistress. It was a good word, making no pretences. His mistress—yes, she could be that. If she loved him enough. . . .

What? Did she love him enough only to be his wife? Not enough to give him his freedom?

Her father's face, with its mocking, incredulous, ironic smile, came into her mind, blurring her thoughts, rousing her to a queer anger against herself.

No. Or yes? . . .

Well, then?

LIII. Two Letters

I

ON the tenth day of Felix's stubborn waiting, a letter came from Rose-Ann. It was at the studio when he returned there early in the afternoon, lying on the floor where the postman had stuck it under the door.

He picked it up, and sat down at his desk. At the very sight of it, of her large undisciplined handwriting on the square envelope, her presence seemed suddenly to fill the room, like a perfume of flowers—seemed to touch and envelope and caress him. He breathed deeply, and the constraint that had held him tense, that had held him rigid all these days and nights, flowed from him. It was as if she had returned herself—and all at once all that had passed was like a nightmare, terrible and queer, but already vanishing into oblivion with the daylight.

He could feel her presence, hear her voice, sweet and familiar; she was as if beside him in the room. All that their marriage had been flooded his mind, memories of peace and happiness and lovely companionship.

Nothing—nothing could break that bond. She knew it as well as he. As if a mere moment could hurt that lifetime of theirs together!

He tore open the letter.

Dear Felix Fay—

That was the way it began. . . .

Dear Felix Fay—What has happened of course makes it necessary for us to make a decision—a decision which I cannot make alone. We have many things in common—tastes, ideas, a love of beauty— and it seems that it would be a pity if we were to lose the opportunity for companionship altogether. We cannot, of course, go on as before—I mean living together so in-

timately. I can find another studio, perhaps near yours.—But I do not know if I am making myself clear. It may sound as if I were proposing to break off our relationship altogether. I have considered that, too; but that is, after all, in your hands. What I am suggesting is that each of us retain our freedom, and live in such a way that we can use that freedom without hurting each other's feelings—but not pretending to be married any more. Only the situation must be quite clear to both of us. Please tell me whether you agree definitely to these terms. If so, I think everything can be arranged in detail so that we both will be happy.

Rose-Ann.

2

Felix's first feeling, oddly enough, when he read this letter, was a sense of Rose-Ann's disloyalty to their studio—the studio which they had made together. . . . His imagination, stunned and shocked, clung bitterly to this one point, as if that were the crux of the matter. . . . That she should not want to live in this studio, this studio whose walls she had kalsomined, whose very floor she had painted! Why, every part of it spelled her! As if he could take her studio, and let her go and live in another! If there was any moving to be done, he would do it. He would get another place. She could live here—she must live here. . . . He would take a few books—no, he would take nothing. It was all hers. . . .

Some obliquity of the imagination helped him, like a drug, anaesthetizing his emotions, during the first few minutes after reading that letter. His mind was actually busy with the practical details of taking up a new residence, as if that were all that mattered.

And then his mind began to feel the pain of what had happened, slowly, increasingly, terrifically. . . . She had repudiated their marriage.

He felt knocked down, trampled, stamped upon, hurt all over.

So *this* was what she had been thinking of! Not of coming home to him—but of living apart from him.

He read the letter again, with a rising anger that mingled with his pain. What was it she said? *"We have many things in common—tastes, ideas, a love of beauty."*—*"Pity if we were to lose the opportunity for companionship altogether"*—*"Not pretending to be married any more."* So it meant nothing to her, then, this marriage? She could end it so easily? And companionship, mere companionship—that did mean something to her? That was what she wanted to keep! *"Everything can be arranged in detail so that we both will be happy."*

What could he reply to a letter like that? What could he say to a girl who told him that her happiness lay in their not being married any more? *"Everything could be arranged in detail."* What detail? Where she was going to live? What did that matter to him? Why should she think that she had to live near him? She need not be so kind. If their marriage meant nothing to her, he could give her up altogether. *"Companionship."* The dead body of their love for consolation? No, she need not have offered him that. . . . She might have spared that touch.

"Whether you agree definitely to these terms." How could she think he would want anything like that? Had she only written that to torture him? She did not insist on breaking off the relationship "altogether." He stared at the words. Was that what she thought of him? That he would be happy—that was her word—happy . . . if—

Verses from a poem, bitter verses, came into his mind:

> *"A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave*
> *Of a great flood that whirls us to the sea.*
> *But as you will! we'll sit contentedly*
> *And eat our pot of honey on the grave."*

He laid his head on his arms, bent over the table, shivering with a fit of cold anger and disgust. Then he roused himself, and wrote quickly an answer to Rose-Ann's letter.

It was only a few lines. He read them over, sealed the envelope, and went out to mail it in the box on the corner . . . where he had gone so often to mail his criticism, so

that he could return and talk the night through at Rose-Ann's side.

3

Rose-Ann had composed her letter with difficulty. At the last moment, interfering with a perfectly clear statement of the case to him, had come a distaste for proposing herself as any man's mistress—even her husband's. . . . She must put it in such a way that he would understand her willingness. He would understand, too, why she had failed before. It was her apologia. . . . And if they lived apart, and—didn't want to have other love-affairs, then they would both be sure that it wasn't her fault. Doubtless she had been rather silly about it. He hadn't really been in love with Phyllis. . . .

It would be possible to go back to him, now. By that letter she had exorcised that ghastly cry that had kept ringing in her ears, night and day— *"You didn't mean it after all!"* She could sleep, now.

She slept. . . . But why didn't his answer come? The mails were uncertain. His letter might be in the postoffice now. It would be delivered tomorrow morning.

She packed for her return journey, and slept again, peacefully.

His letter came, and her father presented it to her with his wise smile. She took it to her room and tore it open.

Rose-Ann, I think it had better be all over for good. I want you to have the studio. I will go somewhere else.

Felix.

4

Incredulous, with that letter burning her flesh, tearing and rasping at her heart where she had thrust it into the bosom of her dress, she made the journey to Chicago.

"All over . . . all over . . . all over. . . ." She could not understand it.

Felix was not in the studio. She called him up at the office. He was not there.

Was he with Phyllis?

She waited. Three days.

"Well," she said aloud to the empty studio. "It's true. It is all over."

She went back to the Motion Picture World, gave some explanation of her absence, and started in making up the magazine.

"You know," said Bodger, the editor, "we're considering moving out to California in the course of the next few months. Los Angeles. Might as well be on the spot. . . . I don't suppose you'd consider coming along with us?"

"Oh, I might!" said Rose-Ann.

LIV. The God and the Pedestal

I

FOR some hours after sending his reply to Rose-Ann, Felix kept his mind steeled against any realization of its consequences. He was in a peculiar state of righteousness—like one who has struck a fatal blow and keeps insisting that he has been struck first. To him, his letter to Rose-Ann appeared but the reflex of her own—and she, as it were, the author of both letters. Yes, the crime was hers!

But just what this crime was, he still managed to keep from realizing—even when, after mailing his letter and sitting for an hour in a kind of stupour at his desk, he rose, took a book from the shelf, and went away to find a room. The book was "The Bab Ballads."

He took the Illinois Central in, and a north side elevated train out again, as though seeking to be as far as possible from the studio. He got off, at a venture, at Wilson Avenue, and within an hour found a small apartment of two rooms and bath, furnished "for light-housekeeping," situated over a coffee-and-tea store, three flights up. It had a fairly large sitting room at the front. He noticed a small book case filled with sets of "The Ivanhoe Novels" and "The Complete Works of Bulwer-Lytton." Felix told the fat middle-aged woman from the store who showed it to him that he would want the bookcase for books of his own, but not immediately; he remarked that he would probably buy some of her coffee in the morning to make his breakfast on; and assured her that he would not set the hot cup on the bare table-top, which she said was real mahogany and had been left her by a deceased roomer whom she had looked

after when he was sick. When she had gone, leaving him the keys, Felix put the Bab Ballads in between the Waverly Novels and the Complete Works of Bulwer-Lytton, and sat down in an old plush-upholstered chair, to make himself at home.

In a few minutes there was a knock—it was the fat woman from the store, who had brought him up a pound of her best coffee.

"Not that I want to bother you," she said. "You needn't be afraid I'll be knocking at your door and keeping watch of your comings and goings—live and let live, is what I say. But I knew from the way you spoke of coffee that you really liked it, and I just thought I'd bring you some for your breakfast. A man that makes his own coffee knows what coffee is—isn't that so!"

He thanked her, and sat down to look out of the window. The interest of the room itself had been exhausted; it was empty equally of memories and of hopes; it was just so many dismal square feet of space. He had uprooted himself from the place in which he had lived for months that were like years, and years that were like lifetimes; he had lived in that studio—really lived in it; he was living there now, in his thoughts; it would take longer to uproot his mind from that place than it had his body. And yet—he could foresee the time, incredible though it was, when that studio life with Rose-Ann would be only a memory, a part of his past . . . like his life with his Iowa sweetheart during their brief idyl, years ago. Yes, the time would come when all this, that was now so warm and near, would be dim and remote; a time when it would no longer hurt him to think about it all. . . .

As he sat there facing the window, looking out unseeingly at the lighted façade of the building opposite, the strains of dance music reached him, and he saw couples float past the windows of the hall on the floor opposite his own. He watched and listened with a kind of dull fascination, for a long time. . . . He was very tired. He thought of going to bed. But that music from across the street would never

stop—it would keep on with its silly gaiety hour after hour.

He rose at last and went out. He was going to his work-room. He could spend several hours cleaning up there—destroying manuscripts he didn't want to keep, reducing the amount of things to be moved to a minimum.

Phyllis might be in her room. . . . He thought of her there, and the thought comforted him. He saw her again, in his thoughts, as he had seen her first—serene and kind and strong. It was good to think of her.

Still his mind did not quite encompass the situation. It was as though something had happened to him—something stupendous, terrible, and almost unbearable, like the death of a beloved friend—something not wholly to be realized. And it had the resistlessness of some such event; he did not conceive it as something within his power to alter or prevent—nor in any sense as something which he had done himself. If he had thought of himself as having done this thing, he might have thought of undoing it. But it was a thing which had happened, like an earthquake. . . .

In his room he gathered up fragments of manuscript—jottings of ideas, efforts, experiments, unfinished things—and tore them up after a casual glance. There would be little to take with him. That was good. . . . He had the feeling that a new life had begun for him, a life at which he still stared in vague bewilderment, like a creature painfully new-born into an uncomprehended world.

2

He could hear Phyllis moving about on the other side of the partition. He finished his work; the wastebasket was full of torn manuscript, and his Roget's Thesaurus and his favourite penholder lay together on the table, ready to take to his new home. He no longer had need of a work-room, a special refuge from the distracting intimacies of marriage. He was free from all that. Yes—think of that—free! . . . He laughed out loud.

Presently Phyllis would come and knock on his door. She had heard him enter, she knew he was there. He

wanted to see her, he wanted the comfort of her eyes, her hands. He wanted her serenity, her kindness, her strength. But he lacked even the energy to ask for it. He could only sit and wait until she came to him.

He felt as though the last strength he possessed were being used up in some terrific effort—an effort that would cease when she came. Then it would make no difference that he had no strength left—her courage and kindness would sustain him.

The impossible had happened—yes, the impossible. For it was unthinkable that Rose-Ann should have destroyed their marriage. But she had. . . . And now in this strange world there was only one certainty left—Phyllis's eyes, her arms, her understanding love. Here was reality, here firm ground amidst a reeling chaos of fantastic madness. . . . Phyllis!

He could hear, as in a dream, the bubbling of coffee, could taste the fragrance of its odour stealing through the door. . . . Presently, very soon, she would come. . . .

He heard her knock, and he thought he answered, but it seemed not, for she knocked again, and then opened the door. He sat there limply in his chair, glad she had come.

"Did I disturb you?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"You're tired!" she said, and came quickly to him and put her hand on his forehead. "I've made some coffee," she said. "It will be good for you."

"Yes," he said, and rose.

She led the way into her room, and pointed to the couch. "Lie down and rest," she said. "I'll give you your coffee in a moment."

She busied herself with cups and saucers, and he watched her from the couch. She came toward him, a cup of coffee in her hand, her arm bare to the elbow, and above it her eyes shining under a tangle of soft brown hair.

"Here!" she said.

When he made no effort to take the cup, she set it down on the stool beside the bed. He took her hand, and drew

her toward him. She yielded to his gesture and sat down beside him on the couch, looking at him with a kind of startled amusement as he took her arm and pressed his cheek against it.

"You're very tired, aren't you?" she said sympathetically, and touched his shoulder with her other hand.

He clung to her arm. It was cool against his cheek. All the beauty, all the peace, all the rest in the world seemed to be in that cool white flesh. Was it because it was hers—or because it was a girl's arm, promising rest and comfort? He did not know. He only clung to it.

"Is it your work—are you having difficulties?" she asked.

He laughed. His work!

That laugh seemed to reassure her in some way. She smiled down at him, bent over him, her hair blinded him, and then her lips brushed his.

"Dear!" she said.

He held her close to him, and their lips met—hungrily, thirstily. At first all her body relaxed into the embrace, and it seemed to him that the peace he needed flowed into him from her kiss, from her arms, her body—rest, the infinite sweetness of rest. . . . And then she seemed to grow frightened. She held herself away from him, she looked at him questioningly.

But, again reassured, she bent again, and surrendered herself to the embrace. But something in the exigence of his mood came to her even in this surrender, and once more, suddenly and coolly, she drew herself away.

"What *is* the matter?" she demanded, looking at him with alien eyes. She bent, not tenderly, and took his shoulder, as if to shake his secret out of him.

"The matter is," said Felix, "that my marriage has gone to hell."

3

"What!" The exclamation came in a tone of utter incredulous astonishment from the girl at his side, who sat there, rigid, as though frozen by that news.

"Yes, I tell you!" he cried. "We've—busted up everything—for good and all."

And feeling himself uncontrollably about to cry, he turned his face against the couch, and lay shaken with convulsive strangling sobs.

The girl sprang up, and looked down at him. She had never seen him cry. She had not known that he could cry. As a matter of fact, he had not cried very many times in his life, and he did not know how, and did it badly.

He looked up at last, brushing his eyes with his coat-sleeve. He wanted her pity.

He saw her looking at him with haughty anger. Her whole gesture was one of outrage. When she saw him look up, she clenched her fists, and said,

"You never told me—"

"Never told you?" His anger burst out against her, anger mixed with self-pity. "What did you expect?"

She turned half away from him in disdain.

"Not this!" she said.

"No!" he said, sitting up. "No, you little idiot, I suppose you didn't. . . . And I didn't either. Well—you see."

She looked back over her shoulder with repugnance, as if she were looking at something sick, wounded, or diseased.

"Yes," she said doubtfully, "I see. . . ."

She turned back to him, her hostility gone, and a mournful look in her eyes.

"I never supposed," she said haltingly, "that you—"

She paused, and then went on,

"—You too—"

Under her glance he straightened up, ashamed of himself. He rose. He must, he supposed, have looked silly. . . .

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I'm sorry too—Felix," she answered, and there was in her tone the quality of a farewell.

There was something bracing at this moment in her scornful silence as she let him walk out of the room. . . . He went to the bathroom and washed his face; looked at himself in the mirror: was the face he saw there the one that

had been twisted in grotesque sobbing a few minutes ago? No one would have guessed it. . . . He looked hard at that face, for some sign of weakness. But it seemed to him that the weakness had been burned out of it by the fire of a girl's scorn. It was a face indifferent and aloof from sorrow, with amused eyes and jauntily smiling mouth. Yes, that was Felix Fay as he should be.

He went back to his room, tossed his Roget's Thesaurus and his favourite penholder into the wastebasket with the torn manuscripts, put on his hat—and then noticed his stick in the corner.

He picked it up, hung it over his arm, turned out the gas, and went out whistling.

Book Six

Wilson Avenue

LV. The Consolations of Philosophy

I

COMING out on the street, swinging his stick, Felix was vividly conscious of the outer world—it was as if the curtain had just risen upon a stage scene. The shapes of the trees in the distance had all the interest of a beautifully painted set—artificial, as scenery should be, not aping nature, but symbolizing it. The houses that stood beside the road were cardboard shapes that suggested great masses of brick and stone. And the way the night sky bent down at the street-end to touch the earth—that was marvelous.

The whole scene was refreshing. It had the beauty of something made to be looked at. It was as if the outer-world were no longer the unnoted background of a drama in which he was a baffled participant: he had stepped out of the play now, he was a spectator—he could look on and enjoy the spectacle.

There was a sense of vast release in his mind. The burden of emotion, of pain, of grief, of anger, the intolerable burden of human illusion, was lifted. His shoulders felt lighter, and he carried himself with a jaunty air.

A man passed him—no spectator like himself of this play, but a participant in it, a man to whom things really seemed to matter. With a tired droop of the head and shoulders, putting one foot mechanically before another, he was going home. Two girls passed, eagerly talking to each other. None of them saw him, or the world through which they moved—they were busy acting their parts, too busy thinking about yesterday and tomorrow.

How good it was no longer to have a part to play—to be able to look on, full of curiosity! He was like a dis-

embodied spirit that wanders freely upon the earth without a care. The world was beautiful. All the time that he had been worrying about other things, it had been beautiful—and he had been too passionately entangled in the coil of personal emotions to notice. . . . The crooked branch of an elm, from which all but a few leaves had fallen, drooping black against the luminous sky—the world had been full of such things all along, and he had never paused to look before.

It was pleasant to have a mind able to notice little things—like the fantastic shadow that danced along the sidewalk, growing shorter and longer and dodging about in front and behind—a mind that could dwell upon light things, instead of revolving eternally in some cycle of hope and fear. A leisurely, disinterested, curious mind!

As he walked, his thoughts touched lightly upon Rose-Ann—he had a fleeting memory-picture, uncoloured by any painful emotion, of her standing on the balcony of that house in Woods Point, about to jump off into the snow-bank; he sensed her as a creature possessed by some wish which she did not understand, driven on by it to delightful and absurd actions. . . . And Clive, ironically officiating as host to a bridal pair in the house which he had built to shelter his own happiness. . . . And Phyllis, holding Clive perpetually at arm's length, because he was not utterly a god. . . . And himself, strangest shape of all, taking the emotions of all these other characters seriously and trying to adjust his life to them! They were like people in a play, strange and foolish, beautiful and pitiful. He saw them all, he saw his own past self, with a delicate and appreciating exactitude.

But they did not matter—he could stop thinking of them, and look at the nimbus of light around the arc lamp on the corner. That was strange and beautiful, too.

To be a spectator of the spectacle of existence! At first that was enough. But presently he was aware of a vague desire for a fellow-spectator. The desire was faint, but faint as it was it moved his steps to the Illinois Central platform, and presently he emerged upon Michigan Avenue.

2

That evening in the Artists' Theatre there was a rehearsal of several episodes from Schnitzler's "Anatol," which was to be the second bill of the season. At midnight Elva Macklin saw Felix Fay stroll in and listen to the jaded end of the rehearsal from the theatre's one tiny and inconvenient box.

Felix saw her, too, and realized by what instinctive wish he had been led, without conscious thought, to the Artists' Theatre. He wanted her for his fellow-spectator of the spectacle of existence.

He saw her as if for the first time. He had never talked with her much; and he had been drunk, on dreams if not on whiskey, the time he had danced with her at the ball. She had been a sort of dream-figure to him, an out-of-the-world creature. He saw her now clearly enough—an intense young egotist in her every word and gesture; no dryad, but soulless enough for all her human nature—a girl who still kept the hardness of a child about her. She would never make a good actress, he reflected; she was too much herself; she was acting abominably her part in this Schnitzler play, but with her own special charm, the charm that made her what she was. But she was not a person to pity. He liked her for that. He would talk to her.

A few moments later, as Elva Macklin was putting on her coat to go home, Felix Fay appeared at the door of the tiny women's dressing room.

The others had gone, she was there alone.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "whoever you are . . . and you may button my spats if you want to, Felix Fay. I'm too tired, and I was going off without them."

She continued, as he knelt at her feet and twisted the reluctant buttons one by one into place, "I've done the circus girl for hours, over and over again. Gregory doesn't like the way I do it—and I don't like the way

Jimmy Taylor does Anatol. Neither does Gregory, for that matter. Everything's gone wrong tonight. . . . Gregory gets more and more Napoleonic. He says, 'Stop! we'll do that scene all over again!' Nothing about what's the matter, or how it should be done—we just know that it doesn't suit him, and so we do it differently. And usually worse. Then he frowns; he bites his lip; he even stamps his foot: but even that doesn't do much good!"

She put out her other foot. "Jimmie's really impossible as Anatol. He looks all right—but he hasn't any spirit. You just can't imagine Jimmie's having six mistresses. He treats me as though I were his aunt. . . . Gregory wants me to do the circus girl 'simply'—whatever that means. I wish he would condescend to explain, instead of just looking haughty. . . . I'm awfully tired. . . . Thanks. I don't feel quite clothed without my spats."

Felix stood up. "Let's go somewhere and get something to eat," he said.

"I'd like to," she said. "I don't want to go home. I'm too tired to sleep." She buttoned her coat about her.

It was a boyish coat, and she wore it with a boyish air. There was something Puck-like in her face, something impish, mischievous.

"Have you a nickname?" he asked curiously.

"Yes," she said, startled. "Why?"

"What is it?"

"Bobby. Again, why?"

He laughed.

"Because I was going to give you one if you hadn't. I was going to name you Till Eulenspiegel. But Bobby will do very well. I shall call you that, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. But you may regret it.—Who was Till Eulenspiegel?" she asked.

"A celebrated scamp.—Why should I regret it?"

"We'll have to number our questions and answers—we're getting all mixed up. Bobby is a celebrated scamp, too. You haven't heard of her? When I'm Elva I'm on my very best behaviour."

"Then come as Bobby, by all means!" he said.

"It's only fair to warn you that you may not like her at all. Some people don't."

"I'm sure *I* shall. Come along!" he laughed.

"Wait a moment. How much money have you got? When I'm Bobby, I insist on paying my own way. But I've only carfare home tonight. So you'll have to lend me some."

He took out a roll of bills from his pocket, all that was left of the two weeks' salary after paying for his apartment, and solemnly divided it.

She accepted the money, and then handed it back. "No, I feel like being recklessly dependent tonight. I'll let you buy my dinner. . . . One moment—I have to turn the lights out. Go ahead, I can find my way out in the dark."

She joined him in the hall a moment later. "The elevator's stopped running," she said, "we'll have to walk down."

Half way down she stopped. "Let's rest and smoke a cigarette."

She lighted her cigarette at his match, and then asked, "What brings you here tonight?"

"Idle curiosity," he said.

She puffed on her cigarette and scrutinized his face by the glow it made in the dark.

"Something's happened to you," she said.

"Right," he answered cheerfully.

"Want to tell me your troubles?" she asked indifferently.

"No," he said. "I haven't any troubles. I've ceased to have them. That's what's happened to me."

She laughed lightly. "So that's it. Well, I'm glad you don't want sympathy. I was afraid you might."

"You misjudged me," he said. "Besides, if I had wanted sympathy, would I have come to you?"

"No, I guess you do know me better than that. . . . Well, what *do* you want of me?"

"Nothing in particular of you," he said. "I just want somebody to bum around with tonight."

She puffed on her cigarette again. "You don't look at all broken-hearted," she said.

"Why should I look broken-hearted?"

"I hear all the theatre-gossip. I suppose it's true?"

"Well, I don't hear the theatre-gossip, so I don't know whether it's true or not. Why should you care?"

"I don't care. I'm just curious. You know, you've been looking worried and unhappy ever since I first saw you—until now. At first I thought you were worried about the play; but when it was a success you looked more unhappy than ever. And now—well, the transformation is astonishing!"

"I can explain that. . . . You probably have in your rooms—"

"My room," she corrected him. "A quite singular room, in every sense."

"In your room, then, you probably have five or six copies of the Rubaiyat, presented you by different youths. . . ."

"Yes, all with a pencil mark beside the 'Book of Verses' verse. Go on."

"Well, in that poem Omar boasts of 'striking from the Calendar Unborn Tomorrow and Dead Yesterday.' I've just performed that same astronomical feat."

"I know just what you mean," she said. "It's—it's like getting over a headache, isn't it? . . . I'm glad. . . . Well, let's go on."

She jumped up.

Out in the street he asked her, "How do you come to know so much about it? When did you perform Omar's astronomical feat?"

She laughed.

I? Oh, fully twenty years ago—at the age of five! . . You see, up to that time I had been the only child—the reigning princess, in fact. And then a little brother came along. People laugh about these things—but I don't think anything in later life can hurt worse than a childish tragedy like that. To be considered the most wonderful

being in all the world, and then—pushed out of the way. . . . Well, I saw that my reign was ended, that human beings were fickle, and that my heart would be broken if I kept on caring. So I stopped—and I've never cared since. Not for a single other living thing in all the world."

"I see you are a person of great experience in—not caring. Twenty years of it! Tell me, how does it work out?"

She stopped suddenly, pulling at his sleeve. "Look!" she said with apparent irrelevance.

He looked in the direction of her upward glance, and saw outlined against the sky a curious accidental roof-line made by the juxtaposition of two buildings. It was nothing—and it had the pure beauty of a design by Hiroshige.

"Yes," he said, gazing at it. An accidental scrap of beauty, unseen by millions of passing eyes, and only revealed, it seemed, to such people as themselves! He gazed, and the knowledge that she too saw it, that her world was full of such moments, and that they could share them together, satisfied his need of companionship. He pressed her arm closer to his side.

They resumed their walk. "You can't see things like that if you care about people," she said. "And that's how it works out. . . . But it's nice to know some one else like that. Only—I don't think this will last, with you. . . ."

"Why?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

"So you believe I'll go back to caring—to being human, as they call it—to having remorse about the past and worries about the future, to being all tangled up in unhappiness again!" he said incredulously.

She laughed, and sang, in a low voice, close to his ear, the lines of a song that went to an old ballad measure:

"Oh, the briary-bush,
That pricks my heart so sore!
If I ever get out of the briary-bush
I'll never get in any more!

"You think you won't, Felix, but you will! People do go back to the briary-bush. You have to learn early, to stay out. . . . But I'm glad you came to see me while you're in this mood. You know, you may get over it in an hour or two!"

"Wait and see!"

LVI. Eulenspiegel

I

"ALL right—I'll wait. . . ."

"Shall we sup in luxury at one of these gilded hotels?"

"Yes, let's," she said.

They went to the grill-room. It was gay with its midnight crowd, an orchestra was playing, and in the cleared space couples were dancing. The waiter found them a little table in the corner.

"I'm really hungry," she said. "I forgot to eat dinner."

"Silly child!" he said. "So did I."

"Who's a silly child?"

"I was waiting for my playmate."

They laughed.

With her cloak thrown back carelessly on the chair, leaning forward with bare elbows on the table, her black hair tousled about her curiously slanting temples, her blouse askew over one shoulder, she was indeed very much a child. And he felt like a child too, and rejoiced in her as a careless and happy playfellow.

"Let's start," she said, ignoring the menu, "with all the different kinds of little fishes."

"Good. And—" he consulted the menu— "a filet mignon?"

She nodded. "And petit pois? . . . And then what? Some kind of salad, I suppose."

"One of the things you keep pulling apart all evening."

"Yes—what are they called? Artichoke. With Hollandaise sauce. And what kind of cocktail?" he asked.

"The one that has a dash of electricity in it."

"A Daiquerai!" he affirmed.

"Right."

"Well, that will do to begin with.—Oh, yes, wine."

"Nothing sweet," she warned him.

"A Sauterne, then?"

"That will be nice," she said.

He gave the order, and when he had finished turned to her. "You know," he said, "it always makes me feel reckless to order wine. I'm always sure that I'm not going to have enough left to tip the waiter."

"I'm glad you feel that way," she said. "It's no fun to dine with people who are blasé about ordering wine—unless you can feel wickedly extravagant about it, you might just as well drink water. The thrill is all in the idea, anyway. I think wine is a much overrated institution—so far as its effects go. . . . I ordered a liqueur once, a beautiful purple thing I had just discovered—I forget the name of it; I ordered it, not to drink, but just to look at—and when the man I was dining with called my attention to my neglect, and I explained, he was outraged! . . . But I wish they would bring the little fishes—I shan't neglect *them*."

"It's nice," he said, "to be able to think and talk about things that don't matter."

"Such as what?"

"Such as little fishes, and poetry. I've been so dreadfully serious-minded for a long time.—Is Gregory going to put on 'The Land of Heart's Desire'?"

"He hasn't decided. If he does—"

"If he does, you must play Mary. It won't be Yeats's Mary, but it will be something very exciting, if you play it."

"I hope he'll let me."

"Do you know 'On Baile's Strand'?"

"He's thinking of doing that, too. I haven't read it. But I hear there's nothing in it for me."

"Oh, yes, there is! There's the part of the young prince. It wouldn't be a half bad idea. You're quite as much a boy as a girl. You'd be a very striking young prince."

"Thank you!"

"However, I was thinking of another part for you—the

part of the warrior-queen that the two kings talk about. You remember?"

"No."

"She doesn't actually appear in the play. But she ought to. I'd like to write you a play about her."

"Tell me about her!"

"She fights like a man, and bears a love-child to a soldier-king—and then makes war on him. He is speaking about her afterward, in Yeats's play, and he says to the older king:

"You have never seen her—ah! Conchobar, had you seen her
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,
Or sitting at the fire with these grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body. . . ."

She drank in the lines eagerly, and when he paused she looked at him gratefully. "I'd like to do a part like that," she said.

The cocktails came, but she pushed hers aside. "Tell me some more about her. She loves and hates the same man? Does he understand that—her lover, I mean."

"Perhaps not at first—in my play, he wouldn't. But in Yeats's play, years later, he does understand. When the older king complains that even his former sweetheart makes war on him, he says:

"No wonder in that, no wonder at all in that.
I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun
And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon—
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of this long 'stablished ground."

"A kiss in the mid-battle!" she repeated. "That is lovely."

She raised her cocktail. "Here's to our play!"

They drank.

"Now," he said, a little embarrassedly, "I feel that I shall have to write that play!"

She put her hand on his for a moment. "Don't feel that," she said. "I know—people dream of things and . . . don't do them. I shan't hold you to account. But it's a lovely dream—and that's what I'm drinking to."

"But wouldn't you rather have the play than the dream?" he asked.

"I don't know. . . . By the time you wrote it—I would be interested in something else, and you would want another girl to do it. Why should we bother with promises? We're not that kind. . . . If I said I loved you—and I could say that right now—I always love people who think of lovely things, and that play was a lovely thing to think of—why, I wouldn't expect you to hold me to account for it . . . later."

"Do you love me?" he asked, in a casual tone.

"Yes. . . . Here are the fishes! . . . Of course I do. You are a terribly nice person. You love me, don't you?"

"Yes," said Felix.

The waiter went away, and she laughed. "That was a test," she said. "A man who can talk about love in the presence of the waiter without looking awkward—! But I meant it, too. . . . These *are* good, aren't they?"

"Delicious! Especially these sprats. I don't know what a sprat is, but I'm sure this is one."

"That's another thing—people ought to be able to talk about love, and food, and art, and money, in the same tone of voice. Some men would be shocked to hear me discuss love and little fishes all in the same breath."

"I seem to be passing all your tests."

"Yes—it doesn't even make you nervous to be compared with other men."

"Oh, I suppose there *are* other men in the world," said Felix. "They don't interest me, but I don't mind your alluding to them."

"So long as it's to their disadvantage!"

"Or any other way. I simply can't take them seriously. Men seem ridiculous creatures to me."

"I've known some very interesting ones!"

"You thought so at the time. A pardonable mistake. The truth is, Bobbie Eulenspiegel, you and I are the only truly interesting people alive in the world at this moment."

She laughed up into his eyes. "I think so too," she said.

She had suddenly become very much a girl, with the light of a feminine magic gleaming in her mischievous eyes.

"Are you flirting with me?" he demanded.

"How did you guess?" she asked.

The orchestra struck up again.

"Shall we dance?" she said, jumping up from the table.

"Yes," he said. "Do you know, the last time I danced with you, I had been drinking, and thought I was dancing with a childhood playmate."

"Aren't I your childhood playmate?" she asked pausing at the edge of the dancing space.

"No, Serpent of the Nile," he said, taking her in his arms. "And you aren't a dryad, either," he went on, as they mingled with the dancers. "You are a water-witch, that's what you are. You dance like water in the sunlight. You are an exhalation from the salt sea wave. You have no body—which is even worse than having no soul; if I knew the proper magic words to pronounce, this which seems to be your body would dissolve, and I would hold in my arms only a handful of shining mist. You are really not here at all—there is no one here but me, talking to myself. In fact, now I think you must be somebody that I invented in a fanciful mood—a quite imaginary person."

"You seem to have a number of contradictory theories about me," she said.

"Yes—the only thing I am quite sure of is that you don't really exist."

"Are you sure that *you* exist?" she mocked.

"No, now that I think of it, I'm not sure,"

"Perhaps you are an imaginary person that *I* invented," she insisted.

"If any one could invent me, I think you might."

"Oh, easily!"

"That shows how little you know me," he said. "I don't think you invented me, after all. You would be prouder of me if you had. Masterpieces like that are not thrown off every day."

"Masterpiece? A mere jeu d'esprit!"

"I renounce you utterly," he said. "You are a base pretender. Besides, you are too young to have thought of such things. I believe you said you were twenty-five."

"I lied, to impress you. I am twenty-four. How old are you?"

"I am twenty-four, too," he said. "Remarkable coincidence!"

"Not at all. I am really twenty-seven."

"Devil! How old are you?"

"Older than you, anyway."

"I don't believe you."

"I *am* an awful liar," she said, with an air of telling him a secret.

"I shall distrust every word you say henceforth."

"Good—then I shall always tell the truth, and you'll be no wiser. You can't hold me."

"Who wants to hold you? Not I!" he said.

"Oh, don't you?"

"What would I do with you? What are you good for? No, I don't want you. Go home," he told her.

"Now I sha'n't."

"All right, stay then."

"I've a rehearsal at ten o'clock tomorrow morning," she remarked.

"What's that to me?"

"I ought to go home and get some sleep."

"Then you probably won't."

"No. I probably won't. . . . There's the waiter bringing our food."

"It can wait," he said.

"You're in no hurry to get home, I take it?"

"No."

The music ended. He led her back to their table.

"Besides—" he said. "I didn't tell you about my new home, did I? It's on the north side."

"Where? I live on the north side too. Think of us two living in the midst of Wilson Avenue respectability. It's very amusing. . . . Is it the dancing or the cocktail that gives us such an appetite?"

"Or the fact that we had no dinner, perhaps? Just off Wilson Avenue, near the L station. A dingy bachelor apartment."

"It can't be worse than mine. I fear I have no talent for home-making."

"There's a dance hall just across the street," he said. "That's why I left home tonight."

"Why let that annoy you? Why not dance there?"

"Yes, why not? Will you go and dance with me?"

Her eyes lit up. "When?"

"Any time. I imagine it's always in full blast. Tonight?"

"Yes!" She clapped her hands. "Now!"

"Our supper. . . ."

"What of it? There are other places to eat, a dog-wagon will do. Come!" She rose, her eyes dancing.

He rose too, throwing his napkin on the table. "Never put off till to-morrow—"

He helped her on with her coat, and when the surprised waiter came with the wine, he demanded his check.

"Yes, sir. And the wine, sir?"

"Give it to me!" said the girl.

He handed it over with a dignified gesture.

"You should have borrowed a corkscrew, too!" said Felix, as they left the room.

"I didn't want the wine," she said. "I just wanted to walk out with it under my arm. I thought you might object."

"Again you misjudge me," said Felix. "You can do all

the foolish things you want to—but don't waste your time doing them to see whether I care. I don't care. You can stand on your head here on Michigan Avenue if you like. I sha'n't mind."

"Shouldn't you?" she said. "Well, then, if I may do as I please, then I sha'n't do anything very outrageous. Would it be very outrageous to visit your apartment in the dead of night with this wine, before we go to the dance across the street? Will you be put out?"

"Probably," said Felix. "But there are other places to live. There is always the park bench, when you have had me turned out of all my apartments."

"Oh, my enthusiasm for you won't last that long. Never fear! . . . Have we enough money to taxi up there?"

"Yes."

"Then let's take the L. It's quicker. Do you like me, Felix?"

"I sha'n't tell you!"

They climbed the elevated steps, and waited for a train. A weary policeman waited there, the only other person on the platform.

"How do you suppose this adventure is going to end?" she asked, as they walked.

"Who knows?" he answered. "That's the fun of an adventure—one never does know."

She sighed. "If I thought you thought you knew—! But you don't, do you?"

"And I don't care."

"Amazing youth! I can't tease you, can I? So I won't try any more. . . . Don't you think I ought to go home and go to bed?"

"I'm sure you ought."

"If we danced all night—"

"I think I will kiss you, right now. The idea has just occurred to me."

Standing on the platform in the glare of the electric lights, under the amused eye of the policeman, they kissed each other.

"I *must* go to that rehearsal at ten o'clock!" she said.

"You shall have three cups of the best coffee the Wilson Avenue Tea and Coffee Store affords," he said smiling, "made by the most expert hands."

She looked frightened. "Let's *walk* up to Wilson Avenue," she said suddenly.

"Good. We can make it by breakfast time. I'd like a nice long walk!"

"No," she said. "There's our train coming! Besides, I can change my mind several times more on the way up. . . ."

2

"You do make good coffee, Felix!" she said, the next morning. "One more cup, and I think I'll be equal to the rehearsal. No, you mustn't come with me."

"I wasn't going to go with you, foolish child. I'm merely going to escort you to the front door."

At the street door she kissed him. "Don't expect me!" she said. "If you wait for me, I shan't come back."

"And if I don't?"

"You'll probably find me curled up on your doorstep when you come home. Good-bye."

He watched her disappear around the corner, then went out and looked on the sidewalk, and in the street. He was looking for a little book which he had tossed out of the window the night before.

He did not find it. Somebody had picked it up and carried it away. . . . But that was better than finding it crumpled and muddy in the gutter. It was the last thing binding him to his old life, and it was just as well that it should be utterly gone.

LVII. Three Days

I

THERE are," writes the learned Winckler in his History of Love, "erotic adventures, or misadventures, which do not arise from any real emotion between the two people immediately concerned, but are a banal reaction from the recent—or even remote—hurts of some other, authentic relationship. Made much of in modern fiction, these misadventures scarcely deserve such attention. It is unprofitable, even for the philosophic moralist, to inquire closely into the details of such baffling relationships; if mere flirtations, they are adulteries none the less; and if adulteries, they still remain mere flirtations. Lacking as they do any personal significance, these misadventures are as devoid of lasting interest to others as to the misadventures themselves."

With all due deference to the learned Winckler, it may perhaps be suggested that the lack of any personal significance in such relationships, and the discovery of it by the persons involved, is worthy of record. . . . There is a charm, real if evanescent, in impersonality; and at times the weary mind finds in this charm a blessed anodyne. It seems, at such times, as though the very nothingness at the heart of such a relationship were the most beautiful thing in the world. A wanderer shipwrecked in a tumultuous tropic sea might well yearn to be cast up on some arctic shore. Deeper than the demands of the senses is the yearning for the Snow Princess, whose kisses are as cool as snowflakes. There is no fever of love in those kisses; their sweet hard chill is like the sight of marble contours; they have the calm of eternity in them.

During his first hours with Elva Macklin, it had seemed

to Felix that he knew the profoundest secret of human wisdom—the vanity of desire. He desired nothing in the world, least of all any gift from his light-hearted companion in Nirvana. She had nothing to give; and whatever she might give and he might take, it was still nothing. It was strange, how like fire ice could be; but fire burns, and leaves nothing the same as before—it transmutes, or destroys; and this crystal flame left them both as they had been. They felt no need of each other; and they could not be disappointed. They were satisfied with themselves; and they could be content to remain strangers for all their nearness. No kiss could bridge the gulf between them; they did not want it bridged; and if they kissed, it was as though to prove that no intimacy, none whatever, could shatter their splendid and perfect isolation, no mere happy human closeness merge their triumphant individual identities. There was a defiance in their kisses—they were proving that they could be to each other everything and yet nothing.

It was quite true that Felix did not care, when Elva Macklin went off to her rehearsal, whether he ever saw her again; he knew she would return; but it made no difference. It never would make any difference. They were strangers; they would remain strangers for ever. There was no danger of love.

And as long as there was no danger, they would enjoy the happy charm of each other's strangeness. . . .

Felix did not go to his office; he stayed in the apartment, writing—writing a play. It was the same play he had been writing ever since his marriage; a new version, and different from all the others. Before, he had written fantastically of people as he wished them to be; now he wrote of them as they were. He knew, now, what human beings were like; himself outside the boundaries of their hopes and fears, he understood them, pitied them, loved them. He wrote of himself as he had been—caught hopelessly in the briary-bush of human passions. . . . Yes, this was a play at last. One must, it seemed, be outside things to understand them.

He was beginning to weary of this warm human nature

in which his imagination was immersed, when Elva Macklin came, suddenly. . . .

"Writing?" she said indifferently.

"Yes—a play."

"Is there a part for me in it?"

"No—not in this one."

She talked of the rehearsal. He put his manuscript aside. . . . She did not care, aside from the question of a part for her, whether he wrote plays or not; thank heaven! She did not care whether he ever became a playwright. She did not care if he ever did anything. She did not, the gods be praised, believe in him!

He went over and kissed her.

2

The second day he wrote again on his play, all day, while again she went to rehearsals. He had not gone to the office at all. He mentioned the fact. It was evident that she did not care. Whether or not the Evening Chronicle had a dramatic editor made no difference to her.

She talked of herself. She was doing her part in "Anatol" magnificently, she said.

He pressed her hand, glad that she was so pleased with herself. She did not need his reassurance. He could not have given it. He did not believe that she would ever do that part well.

He remarked that he was writing a great play. She smiled, and patted his hand. Probably she did not believe it. Anyway, she didn't care, so long as he didn't need sympathy and encouragement. . . .

They were very happy. . . .

3

The end came suddenly, on the morning of the fourth day. They were having coffee.

She yawned, and asked for another cup. "I don't think I'll come back today," she said casually.

He laughed. He couldn't help it.

"You, too?" she asked.

"Yes," he said frankly. "I'm getting interested in my play. . . . I suppose I've been rather a nuisance, talking about that play!"

"And you're bored hearing what a great actress I am!" she said.

They smiled at each other.

"It's been very nice!" she said.

"You are a darling!" he told her.

"I'll pay you a real compliment," she said. "You are as much of an egotist as I am. I like you. I can go off now and think about my part and never give you another thought. . . . And you won't mind."

"No. But I, on the contrary, shall think about you often —and put you in a play sometime."

They chatted until it was time for her to go to the rehearsal.

"Will you button my spats?" she asked.

He knelt and pried the buttons into their eyelets.

"Good-bye," she said, and lifted her face to be kissed.

For the first time, in this good-bye kiss, there was expressed a real affection. At least, they were friends now. They wished each other well. They cared—a little —about each other. Doubtless that was why they had begun wanting each other's praise, begun to be annoyed at each other's indifference. They were friends already—they might perhaps become more than friends. That was why they were not going to see each other any more.

It had been perfect. It must not be spoiled.

"Good-bye, Felix dear."

He put his arms about her.

"Good-bye, Bobbie Eulenspiegel."

"I do like you."

"I like you, too."

They kissed again, and she went.

He turned back to his play.

4

Late that evening he finished the rough draft of his second act. That was as far as he could go. He had put into his characters all he knew of them. The rest of the play would wait. He put his manuscript away.

And as he put it away, the thoughts that it had shut out by its dream-like presentment of them began painfully to crowd in upon him. . . . Elva had been right; not caring was only a mood with him—and it was already over. She had predicted that it would last three hours. It had lasted three days.

All the emotions that he had forgotten and escaped rushed in to hurt and confuse him. His little moment of careless freedom was over. . . . Tomorrow he would go back to the office and see if he still had a job.

And what had been his marriage . . . it could not be ended like this. He could not simply run away. They would have to meet and talk. Make arrangements. . . . The obsequies of marriage. . . .

The past and the present were back again on his calendar.

LVIII. Rendezvous

I

GOING back to the office the next morning, Felix had the sense of his absence—so momentous to himself—not having been particularly remarked. . . . True, there had been no new plays opening that week; and the editorial page could get along without his assistance. But it was strange to go back to the real world and find that it does not know you have been away! . . . He worked all morning, distractedly, on a column for the Saturday page, and arranged a layout of photographs of actors and actresses.

He had glanced that morning into the busy editorial writers' room, and Clive had not been there. He had been assailed by a vague feeling of self-reproach, as his imagination presented to him the possible meaning of that absence. He had quite amazingly—it now seemed to him—left Clive out of his considerations altogether. How all this might affect Clive had simply not occurred to him. . . . They all of them had had a way of treating each other as super-people. They had disdained the notion of sparing each other's feelings; they had not even been willing to admit that they had feelings which might require to be spared! . . . But there was no reason to believe that Clive, any more than himself, should come out of this emotional earthquake unscathed.

At noon he went in to ask about his friend. But as soon as he entered, Willie Smith looked up and said,

"Oh, here you are! Well, tell us what it's all about!"

"What what's about?" Felix asked, confused.

"Clive's getting married. You know about it, don't you? You don't? Well, I thought you'd know all about it!"

"Is he married?"

"Where's that card, Hosmer? Well, I'm surprised. I thought you'd be in on it.—Can't you find that card? He's married all right. To some girl named—I forget her name. And you didn't know anything about it! Well, he had us guessing all week. He didn't show up, and we thought he must be sick. And then Hosmer saw in the morning papers that a license had been issued to John C. Bangs and some girl. Hosmer's entitled to all the credit for deducing that John C. Bangs was our old friend Clive—I wouldn't believe it. And then the announcement came.—Oh, here it is, right here. Have you got any idea who the girl is?"

Felix took the card, on which was written in Clive's small, precise handwriting:

Phyllis Nelson and Clive Bangs
announce their marriage
at the City Hall in Chicago
Friday, November twenty-eighth

"Today!" he said. "Yes. . . . I know the girl. Will you give me the card? I suppose there's one waiting for me at home, but I'd like to have this now."

2

California! . . . Rose-Ann went about her work that same morning with the thought always in her mind. Going away would simplify everything. In California one could start one's life anew.

There was no need to make a fuss about anything. She had her work. Life would go on. She would make new friends. . . . Yes, going away made it easy. She wouldn't even have to plan for a new place to live, if she were going away soon; she could just take a room anywhere, and not tell any one where it was. Or she might even stay on in the studio. It was only for a little longer.

Yes, she would stay there; she wouldn't hide herself. Nobody need pity her. After all, she and Felix had been drifting apart for a long time; they had been seeing less

and less of each other; the break had come gradually; this was merely the end. There were some things about it that she did not understand—but no matter. She accepted the situation as it stood.

In that spirit of bravado, she went that noon to the little Hungarian restaurant where she and Felix and Clive and Phyllis had lunched so often. She went to her accustomed table, and sat there, remembering what Clive had once said and they had all laughingly agreed to, in the days when they believed themselves wonderful young people who could talk about anything—that if anything ever happened to them of the sort that "couldn't be discussed," they would come here and discuss it "in the teeth of God and Nature."

Well, she was here and they were not.

She wondered at little at Clive's absence. Was he off breaking his heart somewhere? Or had he, as they had all boasted of themselves, no heart to break? At all events, she had stood her ground.

Some one entered, and she looked up, as of old habit when she arrived first.

It was Felix.

3

She sat quietly and waited for him. He came over, seeming glad to see her, and slouched into a chair. "I wondered if I'd find you here," he said.

"I wondered if you'd come!" she said. She was astonished to find in herself no emotion except that of being glad that he had come—simply that.

"Last night," he said, "I wanted to come to see you. And I was afraid to, I guess. Because of things I didn't want to tell you about—that I thought you wouldn't understand."

The table, that place dedicated to the telling of impossible truths, still had for them its old magic. "Last night," she said, smiling ruefully, "I set the alarm clock to go off at midnight. . . . If you didn't come by then, I was going to forget you."

"And I didn't come," he said.

"No. . . . I waited till the clock went off. I said that if you came before that I would forgive you everything—anything."

"How could I come?" he asked. "Before one can be forgiven, one must be ashamed. And I wasn't ashamed. I'm not now."

"Why should you be?" she asked.

"But you don't know," he said. "Or do you? Have you seen Phyllis?"

"Phyllis? No!"

"Neither have I—for three days."

"But I thought—"

"No you didn't." He leaned forward. "Tell me—did you ever *believe*—not your mind, but with your emotions!—that I was in love with Phyllis? Were you ever really jealous of her? Did you ever take her seriously, as your rival?"

"No—not the real Phyllis—no. The real Phyllis I liked, and was sorry for and . . . perhaps a little afraid of—but not as a rival. I *was* jealous of the Phyllis who—who existed only in your mind."

"My illusion of her, yes. But why?"

"Felix, you robbed me to give to that illusion. You loved in her what you refused to see in me to love. I might have been all that she was to you—and you wouldn't let me! When you spoke of her, I kept thinking, 'He might say those things of me!'—and you might, much more truly."

"Then why did you push me into her arms—into the arms of the real Phyllis . . . the one you were afraid of! Because you knew she'd hurt me? Was that it?"

They were talking in the eager low tones of their accustomed discussion, cut off by the influences of this spot from any disturbing sense of outer things—alone in an enchanted solitude, a magic circle into which none but the waiter could intrude.

"Hurt you?" A look of tenderness shone fleetingly in Rose-Ann's eyes, half-contradicted by a triumphant smile. "Did she hurt you? I'm sorry, Felix."

"Are you?"

"No—I'm glad! I wanted you to be hurt! I wanted to punish you—for dreaming of her—punish you by making you find out. . . ."

"It would serve you right if the illusion had turned out to be true after all, wouldn't it?"

"I thought it had, Felix. What happened?"

"I don't know exactly. But look at this!"

He took the card from his pocket and put it before her.

At that moment the waiter came up, bowing them welcome. "You haf' not been here for many days now," he said. "I begin to think you desert us! Haf' you your order ready?"

"You know what we want," said Felix absently.

"Yes, sir. Everything shall be as always!" He beamed and ceased to exist.

Felix turned again to Rose-Ann, who sat staring quietly at the card.

"You aren't surprised?" he asked.

"I feel that I knew it all along, somehow!" she said.

"Yes, so did I. . . . That's the queer thing. All this other—"

"Was just Phyllis's game with Clive. I don't mean she did it on purpose. She couldn't help it!"

"It was Clive's game too," he insisted.

"In a sense, yes. . . . She tormented him, ran away from him—and played up to you—all for Clive's sake. . . . I'm sorry, Felix!"

"For me? You needn't be. You were victimized too. By your pride—just as I by my vanity!"

"Yes," she said, "and now—at last—they can have their happiness!"

They were silent for a moment, contemplating the tragic farce in which they had acted their tragi-comic parts.

"So," he said ironically, "it was to make their marriage possible that we were so busy destroying our own!"

"No—I won't have that. If she's hurt you, I'm sorry, Felix; I really am. But I can't think of us just as helpless

victims. Why did we do it? We have our own quarrel, Felix."

"Yes—a quarrel in which no one else counts. I know. But first let me explain. She did hurt me. But I found consolation."

"In whom?" she asked sharply.

"Elva Macklin."

"That queer egotistic little theatre-waif! Felix!"

"Say what you like—I'm not ashamed of it."

"You *couldn't* love her!"

"No—I never pretended to. Nor she."

"I'm ashamed for you, Felix, if you're not!"

"Be ashamed, then. I can't be. I've tried."

"Why try?"

"People that are ashamed—can be forgiven."

"But I can't understand it. . . ."

"Neither can I."

"If it had been some one you loved—"

"You might have lost me."

"I've lost you now," she said sadly.

"No."

"Yes."

"I'll tell you one thing I *am* ashamed of. No—I don't know whether I can or not. It's too silly."

"Tell me."

"I'll tell it backwards. . . . This morning I found a bottle of wine in my apartment—the relic of that orgy of which you are so scornful. It was unopened. I decided to make a present of it to my landlady. She thanked me and rummaged on a shelf and gave me in return a book—a book with my name in it that she had found in her areaway. She had been saving it for me. . . . That's the end of the story. Here's the book."

He took from his pocket a soiled copy of the Bab Ballads. She gazed at it.

"Oh! you took it with you?"

"To my new home, yes—to remember you by. But wait. It did make me remember you—too well—and so I flung

it out the window. That's what I am ashamed of, Rose-Ann. I know it's absurd. But we're telling each other the truth. . . . And it's not Elva, nor anything else—but just what I did to that book, that I want to ask your forgiveness for. . . ."

"Was *she* there?"

"Yes. That was why."

"I'm glad you did it!"

"You don't understand. That book—it's more than just you, Rose-Ann: it's all you stand for to me. . . . I wanted to get rid of it all."

"What *do* I stand for, to you?"

He thought a moment, and then answered, as if the word had pushed itself up out of the deeps of his mind.

"Reality."

"Merely that?" Her voice was disdainful and challenging.

He took up its challenge.

"No—more than that. Pain. You stand for that."

"I?"

"And heartbreak."

"I?"

"And yesterday and tomorrow."

"And am I," she demanded quietly, "never to stand for any of the beautiful things?—Must you find them—or think you find them—in Phyllis . . . and Elva? . . ."

He felt as though they had reached the crux of their discussion at last. And he felt, too, that it was a perilous moment. He could sense the forces of an intense resistance gathering in her mind.

"Yes, that's our quarrel," he said.

"What?"

He spoke with a sudden anger, only half repressed.

"You won't help me. You never have. You tell me lies. . . ."

"Felix!"

"Yes, you do. And I—I believe you, because it is you who tell them. Lies about life."

"What have I told you?"

"That I could be free. I *was* free, Rose-Ann. With Elva. For three days. That was quite enough. And that's why I am not ashamed or sorry. I learned something from her that you refused to tell me."

"What did you learn—from her?"

"That I don't want freedom."

"Don't you?" she mocked gently. "The truth, Felix!"

"Oh, it's beautiful enough! As death is more beautiful than life. As for me, after a little cupful of death, I prefer pain and heartbreak. I prefer you."

"But—it's as if you wanted me to make you unhappy, Felix. . . . That's what you are saying!"

"Isn't it true? You *have* made me unhappy. And happy, too, Rose-Ann. The two things go together. I want them both. Not this mad, mystical peace that is like death."

"The mad mystical peace of death," she repeated. "You make it very alluring, Felix. One gets tired of life. . . . Just as you got tired of me. But perhaps—perhaps I am not what you think I am. Perhaps I can understand the joys of a little cupful of death—I, too."

The waiter arrived with a savoury stew. He uncovered the dish with a flourish. It reeked of nutritiousness. They stared at it helplessly. The waiter went away.

"I can't eat," Rose-Ann said appealingly.

Sympathetically he passed her a cigarette.

"Felix," she said, "I know what you think you want. It's like that stew. You ought to want it; but you don't. You want coffee and cigarettes and talk and poetry—not the solid food of life. . . . You try to fool yourself. And you try to fool me."

She paused and then went on with sudden passion, "You've accused me of lying to you. It's you who have lied! Whose fault is it if I didn't mean what I said—that time? You've never been honest with me. You were never willing to face the future. I tried to talk with you, but you wouldn't. You made me feel that I was wrong. And so I tried to believe differently about our marriage. And

when the real truth came out—yes, the truth!—I wasn't prepared to meet it. I was a coward.—Perhaps I'm a coward still. I don't know. But I know this—I'm not willing to do what you say you want me to do—bind you, tame you, keep you. No! I won't be . . . *a wife.*"

LIX. Unanswered Questions

1

FELIX smiled at her. "Nor even a woman, Rose-Ann?"

"If that's what being a woman is, no. But you're mistaken. A woman can be something else besides that."

"So it seems. I always had the notion that they understood life better than I did. But I'm mistaken, I guess."

"Would you like to be *my* keeper?" she flashed out. "Would *you* want to guard and watch after me, and keep me in the paths I should go in?"

He looked at her intently. "So that—that is what you want?" he hazarded.

For a moment that seemed to him the truth hidden behind all Rose-Ann's evasions. But before he had time to read confirmation in her startled eyes, the waiter came up.

"Is there anything else?—You don't like the stew today?"

He stood there, a statue of injured pride, looking at the neglected dish.

"It's a noble stew," said Felix. "Nothing wrong with the stew. Bring our coffee."

"Yes, sir. Shall I take away the stew?"

"Please."

He bore it away with a mournful air.

2

Rose-Ann was sitting back in her chair with the air of the discussion having become too absurd to go on with.

Felix looked inquiry.

"How little we know each other after all," she said.

"Meaning?"

"Have you forgotten what you said? I hope so. . . .

Felix, if I wanted those things from my lover . . . to be kept and guarded . . . would I have chosen *you?*"

She dealt the blow lightly, looking away from him. He paled a little. "Perhaps not," he said sullenly. And then—"Forgive me for being ridiculous."

"I only meant," she said; still looking away, "that I don't want to spoil you. I like you as you are. . . . And if you insist upon being taught the cave-man virtues, why you will have to get some other woman to teach them to you. I decline the office."

"Very well," he said, "I sha'n't ask you again."

3

"It's just as well the way it has turned out," she said. "We might have made ourselves miserable trying to please each other. Now we can be ourselves."

"And what is your notion of that?"

"For me—freedom."

He smiled incredulously, scornfully.

"I've been trying," she said, "against all my principles, to be a wife—for nearly two years. We both agree that I was a failure at it. I shall never try to be a wife again, Felix. . . . As for freedom—You speak as one who knows what it is. I have still to find out. Do you think you can forbid me my little cupfuls of mad, mystical peace?"

"Your coffee," said the waiter.

"If I choose to have adventures, who are you to say No to me?" she said mockingly.

Felix did not answer.

4

"My paper is moving to Los Angeles this winter," Rose-Ann said presently, in a casual tone.

"And I suppose," he replied, in an equally casual way, "that you are going along. . . ."

"I hope so," she said. "The details aren't settled yet, but I expect to go. . . . Perhaps very soon."

"I forgot to tell you," he remarked, "that I am writing another play."

"I should like to see it before I go. Won't you come in to see me occasionally? I'm going to stay in the studio until I leave. There's no reason why we can't be friends."

"None whatever," he said.

"I'm glad we've had this talk, Felix. Talk does straighten things out, doesn't it? And now I must hurry back to the office. You *will* come and see me?"

"Yes. I'll stay and finish my coffee if you don't mind."

She went away, and he sat there for a long time, smoking cigarettes.

LX. A Leave-taking

I

ROSE-ANN left for Los Angeles during the Christmas holidays. During the month that had elapsed before her departure, Felix had been to see her several times a week. . . . There is something disconcerting in finding oneself treated by one's wife as a new acquaintance—in a politely friendly manner, quite as she treats any other guest. He had gone away more than once secretly enraged, swearing that he would not go again; at other times it seemed to him a prodigious joke.

To knock at the door of his own studio; to sit as a guest upon a chair he had painted with his own hands; that was sufficiently strange. To invite formally to dinner—in order not to be merely one of several of her friends and admirers, in order to have a word with her alone—the girl with whom one has talked all night more nights than one could remember: that was stranger still. But to be met at the door, when you came to your studio a little early to escort her to that dinner, by a rather shy startled figure in a scarlet dressing gown well-known to you, but now clasped with firm fingers at her bosom, and asked to wait before the fire while she finished dressing behind the screen at the back, in a tone which cancelled utterly the countless intimacies that you have shared—that was the strangest of all. . . . Was it any wonder that, having thus achieved the opportunity for a word or two alone with her he should have found it impossible to say any words whatever except such as would be appropriate addressed to a young woman with whom one stood on such a footing? One might talk to her seriously about ideas, or lightly about friends; one might be argumentative or witty; one might pay her com-

pliments, even equivocal and daring compliments, of whose double meaning she would seem unconscious; one might, in short, pay court to her as one might to a hundred others.

But as for anything more—

Try it and see. . . . Treat a young woman to whom you are a perfect stranger, with an air of familiar lang syne; show up her airs of reserve as an absurd affectation; stand for no nonsense from her! Do not let her pretend; break down that silly barrier of proud virginal constraint. Remind her that in some previous existence, millions of years ago, she was the docile companion of your pillow. What right has she to that look of a defiant vestal? . . . Yes, tell her so!

Did you think she was yours, that she belonged to you now and henceforth? Well you are mistaken. She belongs to herself.

You remember a time when—? Well, she doesn't remember. Pay your court! Perhaps in another thousand years or so you may get to be fairly well acquainted with her. Not so well acquainted as Tom, who jests with her familiarly, or Billy, whom she pets, or that young painter, of whom she seems quite fond; but she likes you, after a fashion—yes, she even encourages you to persevere.

"Had we but world enough, and time
This coyness, lady, were no crime!"

But day after day, in this preposterous fashion, is slipping past; and she says she is going to Los Angeles: and who are you to prevent her?

To Felix it bore very much the aspect of ironic comedy. One can often see a joke when one cannot laugh at it. But what, after all, was the point of this particular joke?

If it was a demonstration that a married couple who have parted may continue to remain good friends, it was eminently successful. That appeared to be the way everybody took it. After the first shock, people seemed pleased. He and Rose-Ann had illustrated the virtues of modernistic marriage;

now they were illustrating the virtues of modernistic divorce—something even more exciting!

Was this a divorce?—the human fact which the law in its laborious way confirmed after due and hypocritic consideration! They were apart; Rose-Ann was going away; what did that mean except a complete separation of their lives? It might be unthinkable, and yet happen just the same. Everything that had happened was unthinkable: divorce was no more so than any of the rest.

He loved her? Well, she knew that. And she loved him—there was no need of questioning that. But she was going away nevertheless: and he was going to let her go away.

How the devil could he stop her?

Plead with her, make promises, threaten, weep? That was child's play. Rose-Ann was not going away because he had omitted to make a scene.

They were past the day of scenes; they had had scenes enough. It wasn't that she wanted. Her going wasn't an idle gesture to evoke his tears. She meant it.

He had never understood her; he realized it now. He had had her in his arms and let her slip out of them; and he didn't know how to win her back.

It was precisely as if they had never been married at all. He was wooing her under difficulties. He wasn't succeeding. . . .

On the evening before she took her train for Los Angeles —she had been very sweet to him in a touch-me-not way all that week—he said to her:

"Must you go, Rose-Ann? I wish you wouldn't."

It was hard to say even so much. He said it quietly enough: there was no need to dramatize the situation. She knew what she was doing to him in going away. He couldn't ask for her pity.

She looked hastily around. She was making fudge in her dismantled studio for a party of friends, and Felix was assisting her. But nobody had overheard his—as it seemed—improper proposal.

She bent close to him, touching his shoulder with hers. "Don't spoil my good-bye party!" she whispered reproachfully; and then stealthily patted his knee with her hand, as if to make amends for her scolding.

He did not ask, after that, to see her off; it was she who commanded his presence. He went sullenly.

She talked about everything which least concerned them, and he wished himself away. He hated her at that moment.

They were in the Pullman, with one more minute by Felix's watch before the train started. He was wishing it were over, when she smiled reminiscently and said "Do you remember seeing me off to Springfield two years ago?"

"I remember," he said doggedly. Why did she want to torment him?

"Only two years—and a whole lifetime to forget them in," she mused. "We ought to be able to manage that."

He looked up, but did not reply.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye?" she said.

He put his arms about her—and once more, as a long time ago, they were swept together in a passionate embrace, that sought by its very pain to impress this moment on their souls, to annihilate time and space for them, and make them remember it always. . . .

And then Felix was outside on the platform, and she was waving him a cheerful good-bye.

2

Back in his apartment, where he had not been since morning, he found a note from Clive, asking him to come out and spent the week-end in Woods Point. Clive had thrown up his job on the Chronicle to write his long postponed novel. As he had told it, he and Phyllis had tossed up a penny to decide which should come first—his novel or her baby . . . and he had lost.

The invitation annoyed Felix. He didn't want to go to Woods Point to hear about Clive's novel.

He sat down at his desk and took out the manuscript of his unfinished play.

LXI. Two Men Discuss a Girl

I

THERE was one thing about writing which Felix felt had never been done justice to by those who had praised the art of literature—it could quite astonishingly fill up the hollow emptiness of one's idle hours. This quality, to be sure, it shared with drinking, opium-smoking, mathematics, pure science, pre-pragmatic philosophy, chess and the collecting of first editions, Japanese prints and postage stamps. But it was less debilitating than drink and philosophy; a surer refuge than chess; and there were no auctions to attend. Moreover one could work out the third act of a play with a triumphant certitude and power such as is denied to people who are engaged in trying to work out conclusions in their personal lives.

When he finished his play, late in January, he was appalled to find that he had nothing with which to occupy his spare time. . . . Of course, he might write his play over again. But he was angry at that play, now he had finished it. It had ended happily. Couldn't one end anything happily except on paper?

On a sudden impulse, he went to the railway station one evening and inquired what time a train left for Springfield. He had got to thinking of Rose-Ann's father. For some reason he wanted to see him. . . . He found that there was a train leaving in half an hour which would reach Springfield in the middle of the night. . . .

He wanted to see Rose-Ann's father: if he waited to make sensible arrangements and pack a bag, something would happen to keep him from going. . . . He bought a ticket, feeling of his unshaven cheek with ink-stained fingers and

reflecting that he looked like a tramp—and went aboard the train.

2

The streets of Springfield were covered with new fallen snow. There were apparently no street cars running at that hour. Felix started to walk toward the Prentiss residence.

He walked for an hour. It was still dark when he reached the big house on the corner. As he approached from a side-street he could see a light burning in the Rev. Mr. Prentiss's study, at the back of the house.

The ground slanted upward from the street, and Felix climbed the stone coping and scrambled up into the back yard. Going up a terrace at the back end of the lot, he could see into the window of the study upstairs. Rose-Ann's father was sitting at his desk, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth, not reading or writing, but just sitting there, looking at the lamp. Felix watched him. Once he moved abruptly, and shifted his unlighted cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, and then sat quietly as before, looking at the lamp.

Felix moved incautiously, and stumbled off the terrace, covering himself with snow. He stood up and brushed it off, and then went down by the back porch underneath the studio window. A memory of Eddie Silver, throwing dollars at the window of his Canal street home, came into his mind, and he felt in his pocket for a coin and rather cautiously threw it up at the window.

It went wide of the mark. He threw another and it tinkled sharply against the glass. He stepped back, and he could see a shadow on the window-pane where Rose-Ann's father had moved between it and the lamp.

He waited a half-minute, and threw a third coin. It rapped squarely against the pane, and a moment later the window was raised and Rose-Ann's father had leaned out. His unlighted cigar was still in his mouth, and a lock of his grey hair fell forward from the back of his head,

waving like a plume. He saw Felix standing in the snow.

For a moment the two stared at each other, and then Rose-Ann's father leaned out still further and pointed downward with an angular arm. Felix pointed toward the porch inquiringly, and Rose-Ann's father nodded emphatically. Then, it being clear that they understood each other, he shut the window.

Felix went up on the porch, after stamping the snow from his shoes. A light was turned on in the kitchen, and the door opened. Mr. Prentiss came out, closed the door softly behind him, and pressed Felix's hand.

"Come on up to my study," he whispered, "but be quiet, so we won't wake everybody up."

With an air of two conspirators, they went softly through the kitchen and dining room, into the hall, and up the stairs. When he had closed his study door behind them, Mr. Prentiss spoke aloud:

"It's all right now. Nobody can hear us up here." And again he shook hands with Felix. "You look done up," he said.

"I walked from the station," said Felix, "and I fell down in your back yard." He laughed. "I look like a disreputable character—I wonder what Rose-Ann's brothers would say if they saw me now!"

"Sit down," said Rose-Ann's father, and pulled up a chair in front of his own. "Have a cigar? You'll find it more restful than those cigarettes of yours. Try this one."

"Thanks," said Felix.

Rose-Ann's father threw away his gnawed unlighted cigar and took another. They lighted up, and smoked for a moment in silence.

"So you came to see me. . . ." said Rose-Ann's father. "I was thinking about coming up to Chicago to see you. . . ."

"I suppose," said Felix, "that you know what the situation is?"

"Mm—yes. . . . Rose-Ann never tells me anything. I have to be a mind-reader. But usually I can figure out

what's going on. When she was here this time it wasn't hard to guess what the trouble was."

"I suppose not," said Felix. "It must seem simple enough to any one on the outside. . . . "

"And then," said Mr. Prentiss with a guilty look, "I've a habit of getting into correspondence with some of Rose-Ann's friends. They drop a bit of news now and then. . . . I used to have quite a correspondence with Will Blake at the Community House. That is why I wasn't so surprised when I heard you two were married. . . . And lately I've been writing to Clive Bangs—very interesting young man: He tells me about a novel he's writing; and sometimes he puts in a word or two about Rose-Ann; not very much, but then I know Rose-Ann; so I can figure things out. . . . I had a letter from him today. . . ."

"What does he say?" asked Felix.

"Nothing in particular; just that he hears that Rose-Ann is quite happy about her work in California."

"You didn't know she'd gone?"

"No—she never tells me anything. Not until a long time after it's happened."

"Well, were you surprised?"

Rose-Ann's father puffed on his cigar. "No—I can't say that I was surprised exactly. I've known her a long time."

"And I've only known her a little more than two years," said Felix.

"She always was a difficult child to manage," said Mr. Prentiss. "Not that I was ever any good at managing her. I just let her have her own way."

"I seem to be pursuing the same tactics," said Felix grimly.

Rose-Ann's father rose and walked across the room and back, his thumbs locked behind his back, the cigar still in his mouth.

He paused before Felix. "Well," he demanded defensively, "what else can we do?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Felix. He laid

down his cigar, looked at it with disapproval and lighted one of his own cigarettes.

"Is it—is it all over between you?" asked Rose-Ann's father softly and rather timidly, looking down at Felix.

"It looks very much that way," said Felix gloomily.

"I was afraid so," said Rose-Ann's father sadly, "I was afraid so."

He walked away, puffing out fierce clouds of smoke.

"It's my fault," said Felix.

"Mm—yes—yes," said Rose-Ann's father from the other side of the room where he had halted with his back to Felix. "Yes, I shouldn't wonder."

"I was unfaithful to her," said Felix doggedly.

"Yes, yes," said Rose-Ann's father hastily from his corner. "That can happen, too. Women are—they drive you to it."

Felix looked at him in surprise.

Rose-Ann's father turned around to face him. "I'm an old man," he said apologetically, "and a priest. You can't expect me to take things like that as seriously as you young folks do. I hear about the sins of the flesh too often to be very much impressed with them."

"I just thought you ought to know," murmured Felix.

"Well, now, to get to the point," said Mr. Prentiss, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," said Felix. "I'm trying to consider Rose-Ann's happiness. . . . She seems to be able to get along without me. . . ."

"Seems to be? seems to be? You don't seem so certain of it yourself?"

"If she can be happy with some one else, why should I interfere?" Felix muttered.

'Who is this some one else?" asked Rose-Ann's father, taking up his march across the room. "Some one in California?"

"Yes, a poet. . . . I've my own little system of espionage, too. I got very chummy with the art editor of the Motion Picture World before he left, and he writes me all the gossip. . . . Besides I've Rose-Ann's description of

him in her last letter to me—we're still friends, you know. 'Tall, awkward, black-haired, blazing black-eyed'—sounds quite romantic."

"Another one of her young geniuses," said Rose-Ann's father with a sigh.

"Another?"

"Yes. . . . She's always had an eye for young genius. Queer-looking specimens usually . . . you should have seen the one she brought home from Chicago once. Name was—Dick, Dick something. A poet. Never heard what became of him, but I imagine that he died of drugs."

"Was she in love with him?"

"It's hard to say. I don't know whether she's ever been in love."

"What!"

Rose-Ann's father came to a halt again. "Oh, yes, she married you; but she ran away from you. . . . And the nearest I can come to telling you why, is that I suspect she ran away because she was afraid she *would* love you. . . . If that sounds foolish, just put it down to the maunderings of an old man."

"It doesn't sound foolish to me," said Felix. "It sounds—true."

"Well, then, I'll tell you something else. I imagine she's nearer to being in love with you *now* than she was when she married you! What do you think of that?"

"Perhaps it's only because it's what I wish to believe," said Felix, "but it sounds like gospel."

"There's such a thing as being afraid of falling in love," mused Rose-Ann's father. "I think she married you because she thought she would be safe from that danger—I know it doesn't sound very complimentary to you, but maybe you know what I mean—and she ran away from you because she found out she was mistaken."

"I know," said Felix, "she's always been afraid of love. . . . So have I, for that matter."

"That's why she chose you."

"Yes."

"Well, there you are. I'm afraid this doesn't help the situation any." Mr. Prentiss moved away, puffing his cigar.

"So you think it's no use?"

"The question is," said Rose-Ann's father, "can you tame her?"

Tame her! Felix remembered suddenly the conversation he had had wth Rose-Ann at their restaurant rendezvous. . . .

Rose-Ann's father sighed. "I've never tried. . . ."

"Neither have I," said Felix. "It might be worth while!"

Rose-Ann's father looked at him quizzically, and for the first time Felix felt in his kindly smile the cynical quality which Rose-Ann had referred to more than once.

Rose-Ann's father shook his head. "You're too much like me," he said.

"I'm her husband, confound it," said Felix, jumping up. "Where is my hat?"

Rose-Ann's father regarded him sympathetically. "You won't stay to breakfast?" he said. "Well—good luck, young man!"

LXII. Theory and Practice

I

AT the end of the second day out on the Santa Fe, Felix had begun to leave winter behind; the desert was blossoming with strange white and scarlet flowers; and the next morning he rode past orange-groves golden with fruit and white with bloom, and quaint little rose-gardens at the way-stations, toward that purple infinite depth along the horizon which began to lift itself into the white peaks of a mountain range. Felix had been vaguely aware that the climate of southern California was supposed to differ from that of the Great Lakes, but to be riding out of a world of ice and snow straight into the heart of spring, seemed to him at once miraculous and auspicious. The green and gold of this new world was significant to him not as a fact of geography, but as a magical response of nature to his heart's impatience. It was a promise of happiness.

Felix was in need of some such happy auspice to hearten him. The determination with which he had started out had been undermined by two days and nights of solitary thought. Sometimes he felt like a martyr going to the stake; and sometimes like a fool. But he was upheld by a theory.

It was the latest of all his theories concerning life in general and himself and Rose-Ann in particular; and he had resolved to act upon that theory at all costs, no matter how absurd it might at any moment seem.

His theory was this: that he and Rose-Ann were married. . . .

. The question of *how* married, whether by the authority of the State of Illinois, or by their own free will and consent, was not permitted to be raised; for if once one

started in considering questions like that, one got nowhere! The *how* of anything in the world was a question one might debate for ever. Plato and H. G. Wells—St. Paul and Bernard Shaw—Tolstoi and Nietzsche—Dante and Milton—and Edward Bok. . . . the sages had never agreed what marriage was. Some said it was a social arrangement, some an agreement between two individuals, some a mystical sacrament; others considered it a necessary evil; and still others a damned nuisance. Felix himself had inclined to the view that it was a relic of barbarism, connected in some way with those other barbaric institutions, Private Property and the State. Perhaps it was; but that was not the point. Whether as a survival of the barbaric idea of possession or by common understanding and consent, whether by the majestic force of law or by private agreement, whether by sensual habitude or as an outward and visible sign of some inward and spiritual grace—they were man and wife.

That seemed to simplify the situation immensely. The relations of two individuals, as such, were infinitely complex and incalculable; but the relations of man and wife were something that the mind could comprehend. Thus—what had happened, as an incident in the history of two human bundles of emotions and ideas, was a mystery profound and unfathomable; but as an incident in the history of a marriage, it was no mystery at all—it was just a quarrel. . . . Married people often quarreled. Why? Perhaps because they were married. . . . And—generally—they made up. Perhaps for the same reason.

It was a comfort to merge the uniqueness of one's woes in the ocean of generality—to feel that in this very perturbation he was representative of a vast class; that even here he was simply a husband!

And the solution of his difficulties was—this being the conclusion to which his theory led—to try to behave like any other husband in the same circumstances. Not—he was quite certain of this—not like Felix Fay. Not like a young man who has read learned books on psychology. But like a husband. . . .

He had elaborated his theory in the spare moments of twenty-four hours devoted to arranging his affairs at the office so that he could be gone for an indefinite period. His first impulse had been to take the train and let his job go hang; but a young man who has just discovered that he is a husband realizes the significance of a job in its relation to his marriage. If he failed in his errand, the job did not matter; but it mattered very much if he succeeded. . . . And yet—he could not explain his predicament to any one; his very dignity as a husband was bound up in his not admitting that anything had gone wrong with his marriage. He had to think up some plausible lie to tell the managing editor. His play—Los Angeles—the moving pictures—five thousand dollars—a chance to direct it personally . . . a lie like that was the sort of thing people liked to believe. The mention of five thousand dollars ought to convince any managing editor. . . . And it did.

The afternoon before he took the train, Felix had gone to see old Mrs. Perk at the Community House Theatre. She was still there, sewing costumes. He threaded a needle for her. They gossiped for a while. Then he asked her suddenly,

"Granny Perk, did you ever run away from your husband?"

A delicious smile of reminiscence stole over her plump old face.

"Yes, bless your heart, I did!" she said. It was as if he had recalled to her some exquisite and delicious adventure.

She shook her head. "I was young," she said, as if that explained much. "I was a girl as liked to have my own way. And so," she said proudly, "one day, I took the bit in my teeth and ran away!"

She put her chin in her plump hand and contemplated her memories.

"It sounds very exciting," said Felix.

"Exciting's no name for it," said Granny Perk. "It was just regular sinful!"

"What did you do, Granny Perk?" he asked curiously.

She straightened up, and looked at him severely.

"I wouldn't be putting ideas into the heads of young folks that are well brought up and content with things as they find them," she said. "Nowadays the boys and girls talk as they should not, but they behave proper enough. It was different in my time. I wouldn't say Boo to a goose—but I was a wild one for all that. But I'm not one to corrupt the youth of the land. So ask me no questions!"

"Tell me one thing," said Felix. "What did your husband do when you ran away?"

"Why, he came after me, to be sure, and brought me home."

"And you lived happily ever after?" asked Felix, laughingly.

"Oh, well now, I guess we got along as well as most," she said. "I've nothing to complain of. . . ."

Did human life go to that pattern, Felix wondered. And if so, what was the use of all his speculations and emotions? He wished he could go after Rose-Ann in the mood of Granny Perk's husband, to whom it had been the most inevitable thing in the world. As it was, he had to brace himself against intellectual doubts for two days and nights with an intellectual theory: the theory that he was Rose-Ann's husband after all.

If he could just remember that—whatever happened!

How does a husband behave on such an occasion? With firmness? That seemed rather absurd. With a tactful brutality? Felix sighed. It would be hard to enact this difficult rôle. . . .

But it was spring—miraculously spring in the dead of winter, and he was going to Rose-Ann! Yucca-blooms and cactus-blossoms, roses and oranges, warm sunlight and the green of riotous vegetation—spring!

It was noon on Saturday that he reached Los Angeles. He went to a hotel, and lunched. Then he took the Pacific Electric to Santa Monica. . . . Rose-Ann lived in Santa Monica.

2

When Rose-Ann reached her apartment in Santa Monica, after a leisurely lunch in Los Angeles, and turned her key in the lock, she heard some one inside spring up and come to the door. It was opened for her, and Felix stood there smiling.

"How did you get in?" she demanded in surprise.

"Never mind how I got in," he said. "I'm here."

"It's a matter of some importance to me how you got in," she retorted, edging around him into the room and putting her purse on the little table. "I am known here as Miss Prentiss. The people here suppose me to be unmarried. . . ." she paused. "How *did* you get in?"

"I walked in. . . . You had left your door unlocked."

"Oh!"

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

She relaxed her attitude of defence, and came over to give him her hand. "Forgive me, Felix, for being so sensitive. I *am* glad to see you. As well as surprised."

Her last remark was a demand for explanations. . . . Should he tell her why he had come? Or dissemble his intentions? Courage!

"You know why I came," he said.

She was on guard again instantly at the challenge in his voice.

"No. . . . Why?"

"Guess!"

He had only his theory to uphold him. Never had she seemed more utterly alien than she became in that moment. There was a cool surprise in her manner, and he felt as though he had committed some stupid insolence.

She did not reply, but only looked at him. He was making up his mind. . . . Now was the time when any husband in the world would assert his mastery of the situation. A contemptuous phrase came into his mind: "cave-man stuff!"

As if she were reading the thoughts in his mind, her

cheeks grew red and then white, and her eyes blazed dangerously. Every muscle was taut.

He took one step toward her; and in that instant a wild frightened look came into her eyes . . . like that in an animal's caught in a trap. He turned away, saw a chair before him, and sat down, sick at heart. No, he would rather fail, than succeed—that way.

When he looked up, she was standing, a little dizzily, beside the table, steadying herself with her hand.

His theory had been wrong. . . . It wasn't husband and wife—it was himself and Rose-Ann.

And yet—was she despising him? Well, let her.

"How long have you been in town?" she asked, quite naturally.

"I arrived this noon," he answered quietly.

"Then you haven't seen anything yet."

"No."

"There are some lovely places."

"I suppose so."

"I'll show you about, if I may. I'd like to."

"I sha'n't be here long," he said. "Only a few days." Since he had failed, he might as well go back quickly.

"I'm sorry you can't stay longer," she said—wistfully, it seemed.

That silly lie he had told to the managing editor to save his dignity, came into his mind. It would save his dignity here too.

"I came to see the moving picture people about my play," he said.

"Oh, did Winters write you about it?"

"Winters? No."

"I told him about it, and he was very much interested."

How utterly absurd! His play a movie! . . . Still, under the circumstances, he could hardly say that to her. . . .

"You haven't settled anything finally, have you?" she went on. "Because you really ought to see Winters. I'll introduce you, if you wish."

"That will be fine," he said mechanically. He wished he could tell her it was a lie; but that would be a confession of his purpose in coming—and his failure.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" she pursued.

"Nothing," he said.

She laughed. "You might be sociable and invite me to tea!"

He pulled himself together. He must play this thing out somehow. It was only for a few days.

"Tea?" he repeated stupidly.

"Can't you come? Then how about dinner?—No—" she bit her lip. "I forgot—I've an engagement for dinner. But—I suppose I can break it . . . if you'd like me to."

"No, don't break your dinner engagement. I can come to tea," he said.

She hesitated, and then said appealing, "I want to be good friends with you, Felix!"

"I see no reason why we shouldn't be," he said. . . . That wasn't very well done—he ought to be able to do better than that. . . . "It will be very nice to have tea with you."

"Have you seen the Palisades?" she asked.

"No."

"No, of course not. . . ."

"The Palisades?" He appeared inquiringly interested.

"Pergolas and palm-trees. You'll like it. We'll go there for a walk."

He smiled. "That will be lovely!"

Rose-Ann put on her hat, and looked at it in the mirror. It did not satisfy her, and she went to a closet for another. She viewed herself with dissatisfaction, and then turned to him and said lightly,

"Wait for me downstairs, Felix, while I change into some fresh things—I get so tired of my work-clothes."

He was swept with a sudden uncontrollable anger, so that he trembled as he stood up. . . . It was strange that this petty humiliation, and not the thought of losing her for ever, should destroy his self-possession! He was

ashamed of himself. He went toward the door. . . . Once outside, he would go away and go home and never see her again. . . .

She followed him to the door and put her hands on his shoulders; and then they were in one another's arms.

3

Rose-Ann began to cry.

"We've spoiled it all," she said.

"How have we spoiled it?" he asked tenderly but troubledly. "You love me. . . ."

"I love you. . . . I think so. Or at least I was terribly lonely for you. But—"

"But what?"

"This only makes it so much harder. This—*this* hasn't changed my mind, Felix." She sat up on the couch.

"I shall never let you leave me now."

"I'm afraid—you'll have to find some other way of keeping me."

"I shall," he said defiantly.

"I—hope so, Felix. . . . I wish I could feel that I was really and truly your wife. I don't—yet."

"Then," he said slowly, "play at being my wife—for a while. Can you do that?"

"I've played at it for nearly two years. It was nice enough. I guess I can—a little longer. Do you suppose that is what it will come to?—just playing at being married, Felix?"

"No. Never. We'll find the answer this time."

"How?"

"I don't know. We'll have to talk everything out. . . ."

"We've talked so often, Felix!"

"Once more!"

"Yes . . . but not now. Let's play at being happy first. Shall we go outdoors?"

"Yes."

"And have our tea. . . . Felix, you will love the palm-trees! I'll put on my prettiest frock—for you."

LXIII. In Play

I

BY an unspoken agreement they postponed their discussion from hour to hour. They were too happy to want to question that happiness. For the moment all was well.

They were playing at being married; playing that everything was all right. . . . And the very fear which lurked in the back of their minds of that impending hour when they must reopen old wounds, heightened the beauty of the present moment.

They loitered on "the Palisades," under palm-trees, in the hot sunshine, and drank in the cold breeze from the ocean—into whose waters, still winter-cold, only the sea-gulls dared to dive.

They walked, under the eaves of that low cliff-wall along the shore, among the few early holiday-makers, and the mothers who had brought their children down to play on the beach. They watched the children feeding the sea-gulls—throwing their remnants of sandwiches out into the water, for the friendly birds to swoop down and take; and the children would clap their hands and venture down closer to the water's edge until some icy wave would sweep in and send them scampering barelegged back over the sand—a lovely game of children and birds and waves that one could watch for ever. . . .

Further down the beach they came to an Inn, where they sat on a balcony and drank tea with rice-cakes, and watched the sun sink lingeringly through bank after bank of cloud into the very ocean, taking with it suddenly the day.

They went to one of the play-places on the beach, and danced and dined, and rode on childish and breath-taking

roller-coasting journeys. And at midnight, still unwearied, still flooded with the joy of being alive and together, they wandered back up the shore, to its remoter haunts, past the piers gleaming with lights, into the darkness wanly illumined by a young moon that climbed up behind the ragged rocks to shoreward.

"Let's come here tomorrow night and build a bonfire," said Rose-Ann. "And bring our supper."

They lay on the sand, still warm from the blaze of day, under the cool wind from the sea, glad to have put off the testing of their happiness another day.

They went back to her apartment.

"What about this alleged poet of yours, Rose-Ann?" he asked casually.

"Eugene?"

"I didn't know his name. . . ."

"Well. . . . he doesn't count, if that's what you mean."

And she kissed him, as if anxious to prove herself all his. Tonight there should be no cloud on their happiness.

2

They breakfasted lazily Sunday noon at a tea-shop in Santa Monica, kept by three quaint little Englishwomen; they dawdled over their shirred eggs and toast and coffee until mid-afternoon, talking. Their table was on a porch under a stucco archway, half screened from the road by a trellis covered with roses.

"Everything is too beautiful," said Rose-Ann. "What have we done to deserve this?"

"Would you like to live here—always?" he asked.

"I'd like to have been a child here," she said. "But the mid-western winter has got into my blood. I guess I want to see snow again!"

"It does seem immoral," he laughed, "—flowers in February!"

"I may go away," she said. "Soon. . . . But not back to Chicago."

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"This—this magazine adventure—is over. . . . I was working to become editor. And now they've offered me the position. And I don't want it. Isn't it funny? It just doesn't mean anything to me. . . . I shall try something different. . . ."

"So shall I," he said unexpectedly. "I'm tired of my job, too."

She smiled. "When you've made your fortune in the movies—"

"That was all a damned lie, Rose-Ann. I haven't the slightest idea of selling anything to the movies."

"You've no idea how easy it is," she said.

"Then that's another reason for my not being interested," he said. "I'm tired of easy things. . . . I lied to the managing editor to get to come out here. It was too easy. It's all too easy. . . . No, I'm in earnest about it.—I came to Chicago expecting to have to fight my way. Chicago was too damned nice to me. I've been living in a pasteboard world ever since. Look at my job—I come and go when I please; and I can say anything I like."

"The Fortunate Youth!" she murmured.

"The Intellectual Playboy," he said. "I can say what I like—because nobody cares. That's the truth. There's nothing heroic in differing with the crowd when the crowd pays you to do it."

"Do you want to be heroic, Felix?"

"Yes. I'd like to live in a world where ideas counted for something—where people might put you in jail if you disagreed with them. Then it would be worth while to have opinions of one's own. One could find out whether one really believed in one's ideas!"

"Find out—how?"

"By suffering for them a little."

"You *are* a Puritan!"

"It's not that. . . . I want the feeling of other minds resisting the impact of my own, as sword clashes with sword. How can I know whether my ideas are true unless they

are put to that test? But I'm let think as I please. It's not a battle, it's a sleight-of-hand performance. It's vaudeville."

"I didn't know you felt that way about your work, Felix."

"You want to throw up your job, Rose-Ann. Why shouldn't I?"

She could not quite tell whether he meant it or not.

"And write?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. But that's not enough. I'm going to do something hard.—Oh, I could be what's called a literary artist . . . the *mot juste* and all that; that's easy, too. One has only to be sufficiently bored or unhappy. . . . . No, I want to deal with something harder than words. I want to build something with my hands—a house, for instance. Why not?"

She leaned forward, smiling. It was sufficiently clear that he was not in earnest. "Where will you build your house?"

"Not in this golden land where it is always afternoon. And not too near Chicago, either. Do you remember the Dunes where we picnicked last summer? There, perhaps. Away from everything."

"I know where you mean. Yes. What kind of house will you build?"

"I suppose that depends to some extent on how much money I have. Let me see, I had thrown up my job a moment ago! I take it back again. Now that I have a house to build, I shall need it. How much do houses cost?"

"It depends on how large they are."

"This will be large, but not too large, I should say."

"Then it will take a small, but not too small, sum of money."

"Just as I thought. And if anybody should be so foolish as to want my play—"

"But do you really mean all this, Felix?"

"Why not? Why can't I have a house like other people?

I realize more and more as time goes on that I am not essentially different from other people. They want houses. Why shouldn't I?"

"If you're in earnest about it, then it isn't a house you mean, Felix. It's a studio. That wouldn't cost very much."

"No. A house!" he insisted.

"But why a house?" she asked.

"Why do people want houses?" he countered.

"But—" she said.

"Yes?"

"You want a place to write in, Felix."

"I shall write in the barn," he said.

"Oh, is there to be a barn?"

"Don't you think a barn would be nice?"

"I think a barn would be lovely. But then what is the house for?"

"I don't know, exactly. You see, I've never had a house. But people seem to have found uses for them. I would settle down in mine and await developments. In the meantime, I could live in it. People do, don't they?"

She laughed. "Yes. People do. . . . But won't you be lonely in such a big house?"

"No," he said, "I sha'n't be lonely. Not in this house! If I am I shall go talk to the cook."

They looked at each other, smiling, and remembering the first morning of their marriage. And for a moment Felix felt that they had drawn nearer than they had ever been in their lives—as if in this foolish dream of house-building he had by some inspired accident touched upon the secret of happiness. . . . And then, in his doubting mind, there rose the fear that this was an emotion shared only in play. It was too trivial a thing to bear the burden of his need of reassurance. No, the hurts which they had inflicted upon each other could not be healed by a jest. . . .

For another moment their gaze still met, suspiciously, as he sought to surprise in her eyes the thoughts, the wishes, that lay mockingly hidden behind that impenetrable curtain. And then they looked away.

The moment in which they had seemed to understand each other had vanished, leaving him with the certainty that it had never existed.

"Come," Rose-Ann cried gaily, "we must go on our picnic."

LXIV. In Earnest

I

SHE had never seemed more dazzling to him, and more remote, than in the hours that followed. They lay on the beach and watched the sunset, and wandered arm in arm through the brief twilight into the darkness. She was happy; and her happiness was a mockery to him. She was tender and passionate—and in that very excess of tenderness and passion seemed to confess to him that this was the end.

She was playing at marriage.

In the vast night the moon rose slowly behind the hills, unseen but palely tinging the sky. They went past stray bonfires far up the shore until they could see it, a slender crescent, cradled between two hills.

Its light faintly touched the edges of the waves with silver.

"What would it be like," Rose-Ann wondered, "to bathe in icy moonlight? Shall we?"

He remembered the time at Woods Point, the first morning of their marriage when she had slipped from their warm bed while he slept, to plunge into the snow. He remembered the sudden loneliness with which he had awakened, and her naked footprints in the snow. . . . It seemed profoundly characteristic of all her strangeness.

What other woman in the world would have left, at dawn, the bed of happy love, to keep such an icy tryst! It was like their whole married life: the warmth of mere human happiness had not satisfied her; she must go out into the bleak strange arctic spaces of emotion; and he must go, too. . . . Well, let her keep her cold assignation with the moonlight alone, this time!

"No," he said resentfully, and gathered driftwood for a

fire, while she undressed in the darkness. . . . He saw her go in, crying out with delight at the water's bitter coldness, and emerge, white and slender and dripping with silver moonlight, from the waves. . . . And this was the creature he had tried to make his wife! This seeker after strange and impossible beauty!

He remembered that he had offered her, in some playful madness that day, a house. A house in the environs of Chicago! Thank heaven, she would never know that he had been in earnest.

She had dried her body miraculously on the tiny tea-towel from their lunch-basket and resumed her clothes by the time his fire was alight, and she came up laughing and hungry, demanding food. He unpacked from the little basket the supper which their hosts of the tea-shop had prepared for them. She munched sandwiches while he broiled bacon on a stick over the blaze.

"We could do this every night on the Dunes," she said—and his heart leaped.

"Rose-Ann," he said. "Don't torment me."

She took his hand. "Do I torment you?" she asked. "I don't mean to. I'm sorry!"

Was it surrender? he wondered—or some new evasion?

"Our marriage—" he said.

"Oh! Must we talk about it?" Her voice was wistful. "We're so happy—as we are."

"As we are. . . . But what are we?" he demanded painfully.

"Together. . . ." she said.

And then, when he did not speak, she asked, a little coldly, "What do you want me to say, Felix?"

"I don't know. . . . There are so many things to say. . . . All the things we haven't said. . . ."

"Must we say them, Felix? Well, then—I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For everything. . . . Felix, if we had met each other for the first time *now*—"

"Yes. . . ."

"We could be very happy, I think. Oh, I know we could!"

"Have we hurt each other so much, then?" he asked sadly.

"It's not that. . . . All that was my fault."

"No," he said.

"Yes. I've thought everything out. And sometimes I think I'm not sorry that it happened. Because I've learned some things I didn't know—about myself."

"Tell me."

"I'd rather not. . . . Felix, I'm not the same person I was. I've found things in myself I'm frightened of. Don't make me tell them. . . ."

"I wish you would."

"They're not nice things, Felix. . . . I woke up last night hating you. . . ." „ ,

Her voice was shaken.

"I'm sorry, Rose-Ann," he said contritely. "You have a right to hate me."

"No," she said. "It's not what you think. It's something else—something you'd never guess."

Suddenly she threw herself face down on the sand and began to cry.

He put his hand on her shoulder. She drew herself away from his touch with a convulsive movement. He looked on, hurt and baffled and frightened.

She sat up, seized his hand and pressed it desperately. "Why can't I trust you?" she asked.

He had lost all clue to her thoughts. "I wish I could help you," he said.

"I don't know—perhaps I'm trying to fool myself again. . . What are you really like, Felix?"

She was looking away from him, gripping his hand, staring blindly into the darkness. She seemed not to be speaking to him. He did not answer.

Her hand relaxed its grip upon his, and she said, drying her tears,

"I despise myself. . . ."

"For crying?" he asked.

"No—for what we've done."

He thought he knew what she meant. "For—playing at marriage?"

"Yes," she said strangely, "playing at marriage. . . ."

He had a moment of clairvoyance, a moment in which his mind saw into the one same realm of memory with hers. . . . He saw them, beside another camp-fire, talking. . . .

"Not afraid," he repeated aloud the words she had said to him then, *"not afraid of life or of any of the beautiful things life may bring us. . . ."*

"Felix!" she cried out. "Don't!"

He was seeing another picture, of themselves walking in a park under great trees that lifted their shivering glooms to the sky. "Everything," she had said, "is all right now." What mockery! And he felt, again, forces that he did not understand hurling themselves on his heart crushing and stunning it. . . .

"We were afraid of life," he said. "We were cowards. Despise me, too."

"Felix!" she cried, "you did care! . . . I never knew!"

2

They looked into the dying embers of the fire.

His mind, as by a shadowy wing, was touched with a faint regret . . . for what? . . . for an old dream, beautiful in its way—a dream of freedom; but a dream only—and worthy only the farewell tribute of a faint and shadowy regret.

"What shall we do?" she whispered.

"Let's build our house, Rose-Ann. Will you?"

"Yes."

THE END